The MASTER MONKEY

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Three black panthers—mother, father and son—drawing nearer and nearer. (Page 21.)

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THE MASTER MONKEY

BY

DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI

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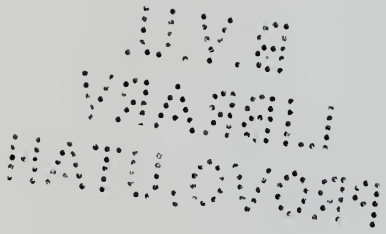
First Edition



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INTRODUCTION

HANUMAN, the hero of my present work, is a monkey-god.

In fact, he is the most heroic animal-creation that has been bequeathed to us by the poets of ancient India.

Today Hanuman is the patron saint of every form of athletics among the Hindus. There is hardly a gymnasium which does not consecrate itself to his patronage. To every boy he is the symbol of loyalty, valour and strength.

If mythology is to be trusted, Hanuman is probably the most astounding animal saint and hero. This is not an easy position to achieve in Hindu literature which abounds in noble characters of elephants, wolves, cows and rabbits. There are fabulous creatures of the air, too, such as Aruna, the Sun-Eagle and "the black stallion of Night caparisoned with stars."

Legends about all of them exist in every part of Hindusthan. But none of them is comparable with the stories told about Hanuman who was half-monkey and half-god. His earthly qualities were as strong as his heavenly ones. He had the impetuosity of a fierce beast and the calm wisdom of a god.

In India we do not speak of Hanuman in the past

tense. In the mind of every Hindu he exists as a symbol. From earliest childhood we hear of the chivalrous monkey. Not only that, but everywhere a youth prays to God to make him as strong and as good as Hanuman.

Incidentally, it should be pointed out that almost all the Hindu athletes learn by heart certain Hanumanic prayers. They say:

"Make me humble as Hanuman;
Make me strong as Hanuman;
Make me pure as Hanuman!"

Can it be said that The Master Monkey occupies the same position in India as does Hercules in the mind of the West?

The former is not like Hercules who is confined to the ancient Greek myths. No American youth believes in the existence of the Grecian hero in the world of today. On the contrary, his Indian contemporary will tell him that Hanuman lives now in the East.

There is a species of black-faced tree-dwellers who are directly descended from him. Very often one of these is found living as a pet in a Hindu home. He is treated as a companion of merit by the son of the house. Wherever the latter goes, his Hanuman goes with him. Occasionally, you can see a boy and his friend attending a wedding or a confirmation.

Constant companionship with his animal friend gradually makes the human being believe that it is

the Hanuman of the legends that he is entertaining. In time the veil that separates the mythological past from the present is torn asunder, merging into the living beast the glorious image of his ancestor. Thus, the common everyday pet becomes the Hanuman of the epics.

I have already mentioned that he is considered the sole divinity who presides over all athletic contests. Though invisible, he sees to it that victory is compelled by those who play fair.

Besides, since the Hindus believe that all energy is the outcome of repose, in every Akhara, gymnasium, there is a shrine where incense is burnt before the stone image of Hanuman by each member entering the premises.

At the end of his exercises, when he is ready to go home, the athlete sits in meditation before the image and thinks of repose for at least a quarter of an hour. Sometimes the young men become so deeply immersed in meditation that they seem motionless as the statue itself.

Here one may ask a question. How did Hanuman come to occupy so exalted and unique a place in Hindu life? What was his upbringing? What disciplines did he undergo?

In the following pages the reader will find some of those colossal experiences ascribed to him by the Hindu epics and folklore. We must add to these the inventions of individual Hindus.

In the East the poetic imagination of a person does not shrink from creating new myths for Hanuman. We show our adoration of him by "creating new praise-garnished tales of heroism."

All the same no matter how inventive, none has found a better substitute for some phases of his life than we find in the Ramayana.

Whether it be Tulsidas in the 17th century A.D. or Vyasa of the 4th century B.C., each despite his poetic genius was compelled to adhere to Valmiki's Ramayana when developing him from boyhood into manhood. Kalidasa too did the same.

Having beheld the submission of the poets of antiquity to the design of Valmiki, when I came to Hanuman's manhood, I succumbed to the logic of the great poet. As Kalidasa puts it: "Where the great ones had made a passage by drilling their way through a diamond, all that I could do was to enter it with the humility of a thread." In short, Hanuman's war-years could not be erased and no other experience could be substituted for it.

Those who have read the Ramayana will remember that Hanuman crossed the "shadow-line" that separates boyhood from manhood during the war in Lanka. By putting him through many harrowing experiences in the field of battle, Valmiki brought him to his maturity.

War may be abhorrent to the modern mind, but to the ancient poets it was probably the chief event

through which they developed their heroes. In antiquity warfare was confined to the combatants who fought one another face to face. It knew nothing of our impersonal wars of mechanised armies and the havoc that aerial bombers can create among the non-combatants far away from the battlefield.

The conflicts in which Hanuman played his part were chivalrous in the strictest sense of the word. He never struck a foul blow; nor did he attack an enemy unperceived. According to Valmiki, he came through the war in superb form. Every virtue of his boyhood grew to its manly proportion.

At the end of the thirteen years in Lanka we find in him an adult, lovable as before, but no longer impulsive and young.

When I had to choose between Hanuman's titanic exploits in the field of honour and some inventions of my own, my taste inclined me towards the former, making me borrow a few chapters from my previous work, "Rama, The Hero of India." In spite of this borrowing, "The Master Monkey" remains a book by itself. For it deals with Hanuman's origin, babyhood, childhood, and last of all, his manhood. It describes those phases of his life that lie scattered through different plays and folklore.

If in "Rama, The Hero of India" the reader tasted the flavour of Valmiki's art, in "The Master Monkey" he will find the poetic images of another kind. It is a work of another quality. It closely resembles a folk-

song. Its art is artless. It aims to acquaint the reader with the depths of literary beauty that characterise the Hindu folk-imagination.

The folk-lores of India can not be called Art for they do not adhere strictly to any consistent form. In the south the lores develop as differently as they do in the north. Every district seems to have its own way of singing about Hanuman. Judged by its contents each song is as touching as a poem by an artist.

To my mind the folk-songs that are never written down give the childhood and boyhood of Hanuman better than any other medium. They still remain the all-important source of inspiration.

Whether I have captured a little of their simple beauty in my present work, I shall depend on my young readers to judge. In the meantime my plea to them is that through "Master Monkey" they will taste some of the conceptions of the Hindu peasants and artisans. What strikes one as phenomenal is that the popular mind of India today takes such delight in mythological characters and purely poetic symbols. It does not hesitate to fashion mammoth dreams for pleasure in this scientific age, when only the skeleton of a mammoth is studied with accuracy. The soul of the East has no quarrel with science. Yet it does not permit scientific realism to dominate everyday tales.

It is no exaggeration to mention that "Master Monkey" is one of the many "everyday tales" that peo-

ple "tell in order to while away boredom." It is not an exotic legend.

Now that I have reached the end of this introduction, I should like to say this to my young readers: "Shoovam astu sharva jagatam; shanti, shanti—Peace, Peace; may the auspicious and the good cover the whole earth!"

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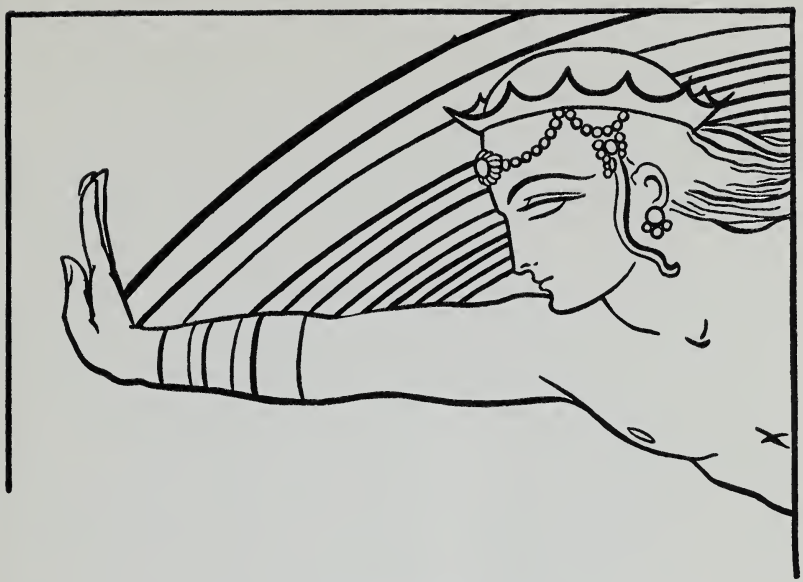
THE MASTER MONKEY

Part One



CHAPTER I

PARENTS OF THE MASTER MONKEY

LET us suppose that an American boy or girl is in India now to witness the Olympic games of the Hindus. It is very easy to imagine the feats of strength and skill displayed.

But there is one thing that is most difficult to conceive: the symbol of the guardian-god of Hindu athletics. On flags, scarlet, green, purple, white, and blue the American will discern the image of a monkey. There is no other country in the world where a baboon is reverenced as the patron saint of physical culture.

How a mere animal became the symbolic master of

every kind of sport, we shall study in the following pages.

It happened thousands of years ago when all Hindusthan thought and expressed itself through mythology. Our epic myths named him Hanuman, the Big-Jaw.

He was descended from the gods. His father was the great God of the Winds. He was a god of the sky, while Hanuman's mother was a divinity of a humbler rank. She was descended of the goddess Earth and taken care of by the God of the Trees, Oak the ancient.

In India of yore the gods of Heaven married the divine daughters of Mother Earth. Pavana the Storm-god proved no exception to this rule.

It was during the spring season one day while flying over from Ceylon into southern India that the God of Storms beheld the rare beauty of Anjana, the nymph. Her charm smote his senses, then took possession of his mind. Within a few minutes of sighting her on the divine tree, Wind, the god, realised that he had fallen in love. Though he tried his utmost to continue his wandering through the sky, he could not do so. In spite of himself, his effulgent wings took him to the oak tree.

Fortunately, there hovered a white cloud near by. After alighting on it, the god folded his wings. Now gazing steadily at Anjana, he proposed, "Maiden, will you marry me?"

Not at all surprised, she questioned the stranger: "Who are you?"

He answered: "I am Pavana, the God of Winds. May I ask what you are, O paragon of loveliness?"

The nymph gave him a short description of her origin: "I am called Anjana, the eye-enchanter; I am a daughter of Mother Earth and foster child to the King of this forest."

"Who is the King of these regions?" Pavana wished to learn of his nature.

"Do you not know the name of my royal father?" asked the nymph.

"How can I? I am a god who was born and brought up in the Himalayas. I never held any intercourse with individual rulers of the southern part of India."

Anjana took pity on his ignorance and informed him: "The King of these forests is Assathwa, this oak."

"This oak on whose branch you are standing?" Pavana asked further.

"He is my guardian," she emphasised.

"But, O maiden, what has all that to do with your marrying me?" complained Pavana.

Anjana let him know that without the permission of her father, she could not marry him.

At this point a very strange thing happened. A series of sounds traversing the turquoise hollow of the sky reached the ear of Pavana. As if some unseen power were about to humiliate him, the god trembled and grew pale. His eyes grew dim. His rose-red face lost its glow. He abruptly ended his present interview, saying: "I beg you, O Anjana, to permit me to withdraw,

for I must answer a very serious call of duty. In a few days, when I return hither, I hope you will consent to be my wife."

Beating his sun-dimming wings, he sprang into the highest sky. In another wink of an eye he turned his face to the south, then sailed away out of sight.

In order to learn a little of the history of her suitor, Anjana went down into the depths of the earth and reached that root of the tree where dwelt the soul of King Oak. It wore a form like that of a transparent moon. It spoke in the language of the gods: "I heard you both. That god spoke so loudly as to reach the lowest strata of the earth."

Anjana asked, "What is your answer, Father? Should I marry him?"

Oak, the tree-king, was very wise. Instead of answering immediately, he asked a question of his own: "Would you consider a slave fit to be your husband?"

"Is Pavana, the God of Storms, a slave?" Anjana's voice trembled with excitement.

The aged tree-god explained: "Before you were born, O my daughter, the gods of Heaven had a war with the Titans of Lanka, the island Ceylon. It lasted a long time. But eventually the Titans prevailed. They made the immortals slaves and took them to Lanka. There they serve the Titans far away from their home in the Himalayas. The Sun-god, the moon, Pavana and the others are but slaves of the monsters, Rakshasas, of Ceylon. Yourself, a free-born nymph, would you not

consider yourself degraded if you wed a slave and rear slave-children?"

Anjana pondered a while, then added: "If I understand that radiant being who sped southwards, he will not accept any answer less than my own hand."

Oak said with grim determination: "In that event, he shall have to give me battle first."

The one who was the subject of their discussion had already traversed the southern forests of India, about one thousand leagues, and reached the sea that separated Lanka from the mainland.

The very sound of his wing-beats spread gladness upon the indigo waters. They rose wave upon wave, foam on foam, to meet him, their playmate of old. Though the god was in great haste, he tarried to play with them. He smote at them with his wings, or skimmed over their crests with diamond-dimming feet. The children shouted with delight at his playfulness filling the four quarters of space with rolling sounds.

Alas, the god had to cut short their fun. He sped towards the gold ramparts of Lanka where hideous monsters mounted guard.

He skirted the main entrance and after rounding half the island reached the back doors through which slaves were permitted entrance to the household of Ravana, the Titan King.

Let us not follow the god to his humiliating duty in the stables of Ravana.

Though he had taken his body to Lanka, he seemed to have left his mind with the divine daughter of Mother Earth. Every hour he thought of Anjana and dreamt of his forthcoming vacation from work in order to spend it with her. It was fortunate that he could drug himself with dreaming, for it enabled him to do his menial tasks as mechanically as a sleepwalker wanders at night.

We must bear in mind that the enslaved gods enjoyed many privileges despite their slavery. Whenever they asked for it, they were allowed many holidays which they spent in travel in the hinterland of India. In fact, after their humble tasks were done, they were free to go anywhere.

Of all the slaves Pavana and Surya, the Sun-god, were permitted the widest latitude of behaviour. For these twain made the rainfalls, the seasons, and all the changes all over the world. Without the sun's warmth all living creatures would die. Similarly, without the movements of the winds, there would be nothing to breathe either on the ground or in the sky. How can life go on without breathing?

It was the discharge of their various duties beyond the boundaries of Ceylon that enabled the Sun, the Wind and the other gods to go far away from time to time. It was not long before Pavana had to depart on a journey to the outer world. In fact, the Rakshasa King had ordered him to blow around the world for the sake of those who can not live without air.

Holding duty more sacred than his own desire to see Anjana again, the god circled the world first, apportioning to each hemisphere its portion of air and moisture.

Having finished his obligatory toil, he flew to that Indian forest where dwelt Anjana with her foster father. There he succeeded in locating the aged tree without much difficulty and alighted on one of its branches. Without any ceremony whatever he asked Oak's consent for his daughter's hand.

Alas, that old tree refused it, saying, "You are aware, O Pavana, that you are no longer free. You are an exile and slave of the demon, Ravana, King of Lanka. You can not marry Anjana."

The tree-king's words lashed the god's pride more harshly than the memory of the fact of his being a slave. Anger leaped like flames from his lips and eyes:

"Slave or not, yield me your offspring instantly. Dare you refuse? If you do, I shall destroy your kingdom as an elephant tramples down a bed of reeds."

To this the tree-king replied in anger, "I refuse, thou braggart! Thou art only a slave!"

Without another word, the body of the god like scorching crystal borne on lightning-livid wings rose to the highest point of the sky. There it grew larger and larger, till the infinite sapphire space rested like a leathern belt about him. Now he launched his attack.

Ere Oak had taken all the precautions necessary to meet his onslaught, the god fell on him. Like a lion on

a herd of Barasings, antelopes, he struck at the flanks of his adversary. Trees fell, branches crashed, copses were laid low and rivers blown off their beds. Flood and destruction swept the land.

Fortunately for Oak's far-spreading dominion, the god suddenly recalled that his holiday had reached its end. He had pressing duties to perform elsewhere. Without waiting to call a truce, he flew away towards Lanka, far to the south, to serve his demon overlord.

Realising that the war was not over for good, the tree-king began to send out messages to those of his subjects who were left alive. His orders were that every tree should drive his roots deep into the earth and wait for another attack. Even the smallest sapling was trained for war.

In time the expected happened. Having earned another holiday from his demon-master's service, the enslaved god came swiftly and fell on the Dandaka forest with the fury of a wolf on a fold of sheep. But this time the trees were more than ready. They made a gallant stand. Despite the destruction of innumerable saplings everywhere around them, the bigger fellows struck the Storm-god many telling blows. They exhausted his forces. This time, too, the war ended abruptly as before. The god flew away to the south, without calling a truce of any kind.

It was on his fourth return to the fray that Pavana compelled victory. This occasion found him well-prepared and armed with all his weapons, the winds of

the four quarters of the sky. From the very start the sea-winds were with him. In a trice they destroyed the tall trees, laying waste measureless tracts of land. Thousands of birds' nests crashed to the ground. Untold wild beasts were buried under the falling boughs.

Pavana himself roared through the skies, ordering and encouraging innumerable breezes, zephyrs, gales, hurricanes and typhoons. Seeing that his hosts had begun to win, now the god himself from the highest sky and with the agility of an eagle on a swan fell upon old Oak. In no time he denuded the old giant of all his leaves and twigs. From the trunk he tore away limbs thick as elephants. But though he smote Assathwa again and again, yet he failed to strike terror into the heart of the tree. Even on the brink of annihilation, Oak gave battle bravely.

At this juncture someone from the hidden recesses of the woods wailed like a frightened child. Both the tree and the god were so incensed that they disregarded the wail. Pavana sent out clarion calls to his winds. He ordered all of them to come to his side. They obeyed instantly. The piercing northern gales, the Malayan winds from the south, the siroccos of the west, tawny as their desert home, showered their blows on Oak. Still he fought, his very roots creaking.

Once more rose the cry of the childlike voice, increasingly louder. As if her father had been defeated beyond doubt, and in order to save his life, Anjana, the celestial nymph, stood between the warriors on a

leopard-shaped cloud: "Enough of this foolish slaughter of birds and beasts. Desist! I command you!" There was compelling authority in her speech.

Like boys caught in a foul fight, the old tree, the god and his vassals stopped the war.

"It is I who must choose my husband," she went on, "as my own fate demands. Oh, my father, permit me to go hence and test the love of this immortal, ere I bear a child for him. I beg you to let me go. Permit me to admit defeat for you before I depart."

Having had enough of war, the tree-king agreed, as did the weary god of the winds. Suddenly, like a sound fading in the silence of the sky, the radiant Anjana vanished in the sapphire hush of the twilight. She had changed her appearance swiftly enough to deceive a god.

"Where is she? Where is she?" cried Assathwa and Pavana again and again, without eliciting the slightest response from the stillness that reigned supreme.

CHAPTER II

MARRIAGE OF PAVANA AND ANJANA

JUST then, one of the winds reminded Pavana that he must return to Lanka.

Instantly, after proclaiming peace to the people of Dandaka, the god called his vassals to fly south with him. With the swish and boom of a thousand seas they flew out of hearing.

Though he had to stay away many days, yet the moment the monster-ruler of Ceylon had permitted him leisure and rest, Pavana returned to Dandaka, as a sound to its echo. On the morrow, he spent many hours searching for Anjana in that green abyss, the forest. But nowhere could he find her. At last, weary and hopeless, he begged for help of Surya, the God of Day.

"O Sun," he exclaimed, "I beg you to find for me the maiden, Anjana. I am in love with her. Though I am an immortal, it seems I shall grow mortal without

her. Can you uncover her hiding place, you who shine everywhere?"

Without the slightest delay, Surya pointed at an amra, mango tree: "Look yonder, she is nibbling at the ripe mangoes."

Pavana exclaimed, "I see no radiant goddess. I can discern only a little monkey in that tree."

"Anjana has assumed the form of a langur. If you care to marry her, you will have to become a male langur," responded Surya.

Without another word, Storm flew to the tree where the little langur was disporting herself.

"Anjana," he boomed, "why have you taken the shape of an ungainly beast?"

"That is my affair," she responded haughtily.

"But it cleaves my heart! Do you not know that if you and I have children, they will be monkeys?"

"How do you know I shall marry you?" she questioned. "If I marry anyone at all, it will be a monkey, for I wish to have a monkey-son whom I shall call Hanuman."

Now turning away from Pavana, Anjana resumed her diet of mangoes.

Without another word and by the power of divine magic that was his, Pavana assumed the shape of a monkey. No doubt this helped him to press his suit to a successful issue.

Before marrying him, Anjana led the god to the King Assathwa in whose presence she revealed to

Pavana the reason that he and she should wed and become parents of a monkey-child. She concluded her short speech: "For the good of all the world and for the liberation of the gods, our offspring has to be a god in animal disguise. You will tell him of his true identity and of his mission in life before he comes of age."

Without hesitating, Pavana made the necessary pledges which automatically sealed their marriage. Just when the ceremony was about to be concluded, a voice from the highest sky prophesied: "Your son will be Hanuman, the monkey-god; he, for centuries to come, will do great acts of courage and hardship. He will be the god of all adventurers, athletes and warriors of India."

CHAPTER III

HANUMAN AND THE SUN-GOD

IT IS a custom of the immortals to endow their children with three virtues, namely: courage, strength and the gift of magic by which an animal can grow big as a mountain or small as a mouse.

Because there is no limit assigned to the powers of infants of the celestials, Hanuman did the most unheard-of feat a moment after his birth. No sooner had he cried into life at dawn, than he beheld the sun redden and ripen like a fruit on the sapphire bough of the east. That instant the little monkey gave a cry of delight and leaped into the air with the fury of the Storm-god himself. He flew on, clearing the white clouds like a herd of bulls, past the spaces of ether. Now standing on the peak of the horizon, he reached

for the sun. He plucked it from the heavens, and put it into his mouth. Then, turning round, he started homeward for his mother's lap. But, lo, in the process of doing this, and, as if by magic, he had grown enormous.

Seeing him returning as an animal a thousand times larger than any baboon or ape, his father spread out his long arms to receive the lad. In a trice, and with the ease of a homing hawk, the youngster landed in Pavana's arms.

"But, my son," begged his mother, "you are devouring the sun; he will set fire to your tender stomach. Do spit the god out. He is no fruit; he is the God of Day."

"Ho, ho, ho," laughed Pavana, delighted by his newborn child's feat.

But Anjana who knew better said, "Surya needs to be free. This moment, if he does not rise, the world will perish in darkness. Release the God of Day, my child."

Hanuman, who was born obedient, obeyed instantly.

When he was safe in the outer air, the God of Day exclaimed, "Full of mischief already! What will he do when he grows up? What a child!"

Now the sun rose in the east, smiting the forests and the heavens into shapes iridescent and dazzling. Hardly had the sun risen higher than the leap of a boy, when Hanuman, fatigued by his recent adventure, fell asleep. As he lay in his father's far-spreading lap, Pavana began intoning a song of magic. Its deep tones stole

through the child's hearing and into his soul which exerted itself from within, to reduce his size. This, of course, happened faster than telling.

Finding him small enough to occupy his mother's lap comfortably, the god gently handed him over to her. Then and there, he whispered to her the magic formula by the reciting of which she could diminish his size at will.

After making sure that his wife had mastered the celestial magic, he whispered words of farewell into her hearing: "My holiday is over. I must return to my monster master."

Being a god, he never planned anything. He made his decisions just before acting upon them. Thus, without a moment's delay, he started tiptoeing his way from tree to tree. Once out of the sleeping infant's earshot, he leaped to the sky, causing no more stir in the air than the trembling of a kingfisher's wings.

CHAPTER IV

HANUMAN ALONE WITH ANJANA

HANUMAN grew very fast. He finished his entire infancy during the weeks that his father had to spend away in Lanka.

The absence of the god made Anjana's task of disciplining and teaching their child rather hard. Her chief difficulty arose from the fact that, no matter how hard she tried, she could not make Hanuman behave consistently like a little monkey.

Not that he was wilful and disobedient, but now and then he forgot that he was only a small monkey. Without any forewarning, an irresistible impulse to act like an immortal god would seize him. Then, he would perform the strangest feats of valour and strength. Even obeying his gentle mother, he did so with the lambent fury of an immortal. Instead of acting like an animal, he flung himself upon every suggestion made by her with the fierce enthusiasm of a god. Besides, his fast growth complicated Anjana's theory of

education. Her mind just could not see a way of dealing with him. Every time he had to do something requiring great strength, the little fellow simply swelled up in size and did as he wished with the slightest exertion. However, his difficulty arose afterwards, when he wanted to shrink back into his original shape. Not knowing any art of magic, he depended upon Anjana to practise the secret magic formula.

One day about sundown, mother and son had lost their way in the woods neighbouring Dandaka forest. No matter which way they turned, their path was blocked by beasts of prey just awakening after their diurnal sleep. Hungry and ferocious animals beset them from every side.

Night fell before long and hung the world with moonlight and stillness. The occasional trills of the night-birds made the atmosphere throb with danger and fear. The suspense they caused grew so intense that it held at bay the greedy echoes in their outlaw haunts.

To guard themselves against every menace, the two monkeys occupied the top of a stout tree. In order to preserve Hanuman from feeling the fear that was abroad, Anjana took him in her arms and sang him to sleep.

For a while, the augmenting sense of something impending left the mother monkey. Hoping that the rest of the night would pass peacefully, and bending over

her offspring, Anjana closed her own eyes and fell into a wakeful sleep.

About the hour of dawn, she was roused by a yell of terror from Hanuman. To her surprise, she found three black panthers, father, mother and son, drawing nearer and nearer. The very sight of them robbed her of her wits. Their six eyes, gleaming green, hypnotised her. But not so, her son! He had already disengaged himself from his mother's embrace, and sprung at the three enemies. Perceiving his attack, the black fiends leaped at him as if in unison. One of them fell on his chest, two others on his two shoulders. They pulled him down and down, till all fell to the floor of the jungle. No sooner had he struck the earth with his feet, than Hanuman exerted himself to the utmost. Lo, his size increased! He became gigantic, and stronger than ten panthers. A sense of immense power surged in his body. Now with a shrug he shook the two off his shoulders. They were flung far away into the forest.

At last, finding his arms free, he struck the third many blows with his fists. But that brought him no respite from the flame-sharp fangs. They bit harder and deeper. Following the cat's example, he opened his jaws wide, then buried his rapier-shaped teeth into the enemy's large back. His scissor-like teeth cut the spine of the panther in two.

This infuriated the other cats who had returned to

the assault. They fell on him like two bolts of black lightning. Alas, in spite of their courage, they were doomed. Hanuman hit them with his fists. His blows fell between the eyes and cracked the skulls of his opponents. They died instantly.

At this point, remembering his mother crouching in fear above, Hanuman expanded his height branch by branch and brought his face close to hers on the top of the tree, and said, "All safe, Mother."

Anjana spoke in words of praise full of pride: "You are indeed the one destined for noble deeds. Am I not fortunate?"

"I am glad you were not hurt," came from Hanuman.

"But you are wounded, my son," said Anjana, beginning to worry.

"No, I am not, Mother," he explained. "Not a single serious wound. My skin has been scratched here and there, that is all. By the way, how do I reassume my smaller shape?"

His mother declared: "You should wash off the taints of war first of all. Go to a pool and bathe. After you have cleansed yourself, return hither. I shall wait for you."

It must have been an hour after sunrise, when Hanuman reappeared before Anjana. He was untainted with fear and cleansed of the grime of war. After applying swift-healing herbs to his wounds, she made

the magic incantations by the power of which the youngster reassumed his original size.

Anjana said, "It is time for me to perform my ablutions. Guide me to the pool where you have been this morning."

CHAPTER V

HANUMAN'S WITS

IN EVERY phase of life, all creatures learn valuable truths. For example, at the earliest moment of their childhood, human beings have to learn that a fire, no matter how orange-like, must be shunned, and that an orange, no matter how hot in appearance, may be eaten. Similarly it is the case with other animals, be they monkeys or eagles.

In his very short infancy Hanuman learned many wise lessons from Anjana. Before his father had returned from Lanka for another holiday, the little fellow had mastered the art of leaping from tree to tree, without increasing his size. He had also learned how to tell a thick vine from a python.

His mother said to him, "I know for certain that you will have many shapes. Now is the time to form the habit of living within the character of each shape.

As a langur, you must do exactly what a little langur does. As a baboon, you must not increase your size beyond that of an ordinary baboon. An actor plays many parts without ever forcing them out of their characters. A small monkey should act like one, provided his mind is alert."

No doubt, she made him do the exercises by which he became exemplary in behaviour. His instincts were eager to do the task desired of him, yet he learned each lesson without haste.

Before he was two months old, he had become the most cunning langur youth of his age. Since neither mother nor son was large, they had great difficulty in avoiding the many attacks of their larger enemies. Instead of force, their wits were their aid.

We have already seen how Hanuman killed the three panthers by brute-strength, gained through increasing his size. Now we come to the story of his cunning. If his brawn helped him to overcome three panthers successfully, his brain could do more. It wiped out of existence hundreds of scaly crocodiles that menaced the life of deer and monkeys in their forest.

In the eastern section of Dandaka ran the Koormika, the crocodile-stream. Its water appeared to possess as many of those lizard-like monsters as there were pebbles on the beach. Nature had also put monkeys and deer in abundance on the land that bordered the Koormika. To this region drifted our two langurs.

Anjana had brought her alert and fast-growing child there, in order to give him the companionship of the smaller tree-dwellers such as "hoolook-gibbons," the langurs, baboons, and others. These were so afraid of the crocodiles that they were fear-sick. In fact, their very breath was a mixture of wind and fear. Hanuman's healthy soul revolted at the thought of living among such people. But his mother insisted that he should conquer those crocodiles and free the monkeys and deer of the disease of fear. Of course, he could crush to death the entire brood of crocodiles, were he permitted to grow large as a mountain. But this being forbidden, he had to resort solely to his cunning.

His desire to destroy the crocodiles was whetted by the sight of the carnage wrought daily by the fiends among the helpless little ones. If a flock of mother langurs came down to drink some water, invariably "the lizards" attacked with such swiftness that many of the babies and mothers were frightened out of their wits. Once the fever of fear had mounted to their heads, they acted like lunatics. They ran up and down the beach instead of rushing back to the trees. In no time their enemies closed in upon them and devoured both young and old. Breakfast, lunch and dinner invariably made the monkeys thirsty. Unable to control their thirst, the poor beasts went down to take a drink of water, knowing well that every yard of the stream was harbouring the enemy. Without teaching the rest

any useful lesson, monkey after monkey perished. The living learned nothing from the tragic death of their friends. Hanuman, at last, realised the stupid character of the race of monkeys. This enraged him.

One afternoon he said to his mother, "I am not going to drink water in their manner. It leaves one at the mercy of the muggars, (reptiles). I must invent a new way."

"Good!" exclaimed Anjana.

"Mother," he asked, "have you noticed any creature that drinks water safely? Can an animal keep his head up and look forward while drinking?"

"What do you mean, my son?" She wished to gather the exact meaning behind his speech.

"I mean," he added, "why do we have to lower our heads in order to drink water? Were our heads up, our eyes would see the scaly fiends coming at us. If we could see the direction and the distance from which they were attacking, we could easily frustrate them. Why can we not lift the water to our lips instead of bending down to it? It is this bending down that blinds our eyes while drinking. Know you of any animal who lifts the water to his lips, for example, with his hands?"

Anjana was amazed at the sagacity of the question asked by her son. Her heart leaped with joy at his cleverness.

With pleasure, she explained: "The only animal

that lifts his drink to his lips is Man. And of all the animals, he is the one who resembles the monkey the most."

"Where can I see him take a drink?" demanded the infant.

"That I do not know. We shall have to wait till your father's return. He can tell us how near we are to the realm of mankind. Then, if he takes us thither, you shall see how men drink water."

"We must not wait for him," continued Hanuman impatiently. "Let us go to the river bank where you will show us how man takes a drink. You have seen him do it. Can you not imitate Man?"

There was something in his voice which intimated that the boy would fret at any delay. As a first step, Anjana sent out a call to the chief male monkeys. They came leaping over trees and branches, as if they were the winds in animal shape. After the clamour of their arrival had subsided, Hanuman apprised them of the coming lesson in drinking water like men.

Monkeys are curious people. All of them were eager to take a lesson. While the brave chief monkeys, led by Hanuman and Anjana, were preparing to embark upon their experiment, some of their followers, now rendered free from the watchful eye of their leaders, came down from their homes and started for the river bank, in order to observe clearly and most carefully the new method of slaking one's thirst. Instead of standing in small flocks, they spread out over a wide area.

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Unfortunately, they were almost on the edge of the river, and though without so intending, they betrayed to the crocodiles that something of importance was afoot.

Anjana and young Hanuman led their friends from the tree-tops to a spot where they could try their experiment, unhampered. They stood ankle-deep in the water, whence they could see floating the scaly heads of the sinister lizards near by. But ever unafraid and ignoring their existence, Anjana, cupping her two hands, scooped up some water, in the manner of a human being. But ere she had lifted the water to her lips and finished the lesson, Hanuman and the monkey elders hastened to imitate her gestures. They were so tense with excitement that before they could drink a drop, the water slipped through their fingers. They tried their best again and again, but without any success. Amazed at the eagerness of her pupils, the teacher stood by and watched. All of a sudden, as if hypnotised by the water and without giving Anjana any warning, all the males except Hanuman, stooped down to slake their thirst in monkey-fashion. They buried their noses in the stream, and shut their eyes.

That instant all the crocodiles charged, coming in their direction with the fury of a thousand pythons. Fortunately for Hanuman, he was beside his mother, whose head, too, had been erect, and who had perceived their enemies' massed attack from the very beginning.

After screaming repeated orders to the others to flee the spot, they succeeded in leading them away just in time. Though they had escaped the rush of crocodiles, they could hardly push through the flocks of langurs—so many had gathered on the river bank to behold the scene.

It was at these that the reptiles had aimed. Since so large a mob could not make good its escape, at least a score were killed. This sharpened the appetite of the pursuers. They seemed to leave the water like one vast army, attempting to cut off the retreat of their victims, many of whom were so frightened and confused that instead of rushing up the trees into places of safety, they kept running hither and yon, but not very far from the river.

Hanuman and Anjana understood the situation and quickly took very cunning steps.

Hanuman whispered, "Let us go faster, leading our people into the deeper woods. The muggers will follow. We shall easily decoy our enemies into a trap."

He shouted to the monkeys, directing them to run to the deepest woods.

All of them followed his command. The reptiles were so incensed at the monkeys' latest move that they decided to pursue them, no matter where. But their prey kept the lead. They fled on and on. Intelligent leadership had placed their feet on the road to safety. Seeing that the depth of the darkest jungle was in

sight, Hanuman ordered the monkeys to go up the tallest trees. This they did quickly.

Happy at being rid of them, Anjana and her boy decided to try another strategy to rout their enemies. Both of them were aware that the stupid "lizards" had lost their mind through anger and greed. The patter and thud of their charge grew louder and louder. Their soft feet thrummed the floor of the forest, emitting a strange noise. It sounded as if a cohort of wild men were beating upon innumerable damp tom-toms.

The two monkeys left on the ground were very crafty. They realised that their enemies could be misled further. In order to tempt them, both mother and son stood still.

The reptiles were heavy and given to swimming. Their webbed feet began to ache on the hard earth. Walking or running was not their outstanding accomplishment. But the sight of the two monkeys loitering a few yards ahead goaded them to rush on.

Imperceptibly, their two opponents broke into a run. Automatically they, too, ran as fast as they could. By now they were lost in the densest jungle where shines no sun nor stars. Having led their enemies completely astray, Hanuman and Anjana raced up a tree. where they settled down to spend the night.

Weary and exhausted with fatigue, the "web-footed" crew below were only too glad to give up the chase.

They groaned and snapped at one another, just to relieve their tired nerves. However, they were so spent by their recent exertions that they could not even quarrel with any success. In a short time the monkeys, oblivious of the crocodiles, had gone to sleep on their tree-top.

Fate was favouring them more than they could dream. Not more than a dozen yards away on another tree were hiding about four large spotted cats whose habit it was to live on langur's meat. Their eight eyes gleamed with the opal fire of delight when they caught sight of the two toothsome monkeys settling down to sleep for the night. No sooner had the stars latticed the azure of the sky, than the cats ran down from their tree to the floor of the forest. Their instinct drove them in the direction of the tree that housed Hanuman and Anjana. Without examining what they were stepping on, they trod on the crocodiles.

The latter, roused from sleep, attacked the intruders. Oh, the fight that ensued was indescribable! In "darkness so thick that not even a needle could pierce it," fought and perished the four cats. Alas, the same fate was awaiting the reptiles. Of their approaching fate, not the slightest suspicion pierced their thick skulls.

About midnight, a large herd of wild buffaloes, numbering hundreds, were grazing past the "web-footed lizards." Being greedy to the extreme, they gave up sleeping for the sake of feasting on buffalo-meat. Heedless of the condition of their battlefield, they rushed

at the legs of "those whose horns were sharper than rapiers and strong as an elephant's teeth." Besides, the buffaloes were on their home ground!

With lowered heads, they ran into the barking and snapping reptiles. The surprise of it shocked the latter out of their wits. Their heavy bodies and rudder-like tails, so convenient for the water, could not execute on land any feats of strength and skill. So, howling with terror, and pierced by far-reaching horns, they were flung hither and yon by the maddened buffaloes. The latter's angry bellows rent the night. From the earth to the stars boomed and reverberated their cries of victory.

On the morrow, when the monkeys came down from their perch, they could not find a single whole reptile. They had been torn into ribands, it seemed. Both Hanuman and Anjana fled the spot. No healthy animal likes to gloat over death, even that of their worst foe.

In order to perform their morning ablutions, they went to the Koormika. What they beheld there surprised them beyond dreams. On the long shore-line where once basked innumerable scaly reptiles, now gambolled langurs and gibbons. What a glorious spectacle!

Anjana took good care to choose a sequestered spot for their bathing.

She said, "Let them be happy. Do not permit yourself to be seen by those whom you have set free, O my

son, lest they show their gratitude to us. Gratitude is noble to feel. But it is humiliating to him who receives it. A good deed is done for its own sake, and not for garnering thanks."

After their baths, scarcely had they gone ashore, when suddenly they heard a sound in the air, as if someone was plucking the strings of a lute.

"Rise to the top of the tallest tree, O my son," said Anjana, "I hear thy father's coming."

It did not take them long to go up a tall deodar (Indian cedar) tree. Now they could hear distinctly the sound of the lute-string change into other grades and shades of sound, till it poured forth tones of fierce beauty.

"The song of my father's coming!" Hanuman made the first poetic utterance of his life.

At last they could see him—Pavana with his black locks combed by the lightning, his tawny eyes sweeping the horizon, his fire-swift limbs, and his crystal wings beating upon the sapphire space, making pleasure-giving music that poured like honey into the hearing of his child.

Though his feet were skimming the highest ether, the moment Pavana's eyes caught sight of the two slight monkeys, he changed shape by his divine magic. Lo, the god turned into a monkey, and leaping from the lowest bough of the azure, landed beside his wife and child.

CHAPTER VI

PAVANA REVEALS HANUMAN'S DESTINY

IT SEEMED to Pavana that his fast-growing child had passed his infancy and was at the threshold of youth. In the few weeks' time that he was absent in Lanka, the little animal had grown in a fabulous manner. The more he examined his body, the stronger grew his conviction that the youth was fit for adult instructions.

After the first flush of joy at seeing one another had passed, he proposed to Anjana that Hanuman be taught the supreme magic.

"The boy must become master of himself. He should be taught to control his size, increasing and decreasing it at will."

When he heard of it, Hanuman begged Pavana, "Yes, please teach me the magic. I want to control my size through my mind. I wish to grow very large."

As if he had something very commonplace to im-

part, Pavana taught the lad the formula of the gods of paradise. It is understandable, in the case of Pavana, who was a deity. To an immortal, magic is a very ordinary art.

To Hanuman it seemed most extraordinary, and he began to make use of it at once. His singing of the formula augmented his stature. From a little langur he grew into a baboon, from a baboon into a monkey, large as a buffalo, from a buffalo into a size exceeding an elephant's; exceeding this too, he appeared like a tawny hill of surpassing beauty. Not satisfied with this, he grew large as a thundercloud, blotting from sight half of the sky.

No sooner had he reached those proportions than he exerted his mind to decrease himself. As if mind and body were completely one, his very thinking reduced him into a langur in no time.

"What an art you have taught me, O my father!" he said with gratitude.

As if to make certain that he had completely mastered the magic, he repeated his latest feat the second time. And like three and three making six, he grew into a dazzling thundercloud shutting out half of the sky; then, by simply wishing it, he swiftly shrank into a langur once more. This time he smiled with the superior feeling of one who had passed a grim test of strength.

"Now," said Pavana, broaching his final plan, "you must know your destiny, my son. You have come to

earth to liberate the enslaved gods from the thralldom of the hideous demon, Ravana, who has ten heads on one pair of shoulders. He is the most cunning antagonist whom we, the immortals, have met. With his ten heads and twenty arms he conquered all the gods."

"How did he happen to enslave you, O my father?" asked Hanuman.

For a second, Pavana's face grew clouded with a sense of sadness. But overcoming it, he began, "It is better to tell you of the beginning, the middle, then the end.

"Centuries before the ten-headed Rakshasa, Ravana, had become King of Lanka, the island belonged to an ancient line of Titans who grew so powerful that they laid siege to the highest Heaven. This angered the Supreme Being exceedingly. Seeing the gods captured by the Titans, He let fall upon the latter His Chakra—disc. That disc possessed of perpetual energy spun round and round and cut off their heads. Only a handful who dived into the Indian seas where no Chakra could reach were saved. There the fallen Titans found refuge and peace in the ocean's unfathomable solitude.

"Ages passed while the Titan chief, Sumali, fretted under the waters and devised many futile plans for retrieving Lanka from the deities whose present King was Visrava, an exceedingly beautiful youth.

"The latter was so fond of the seven arts that he gave up the old science of warfare. All his subjects

shared with him his cult of the arts and named their ruler the Seven Swords of Beauty. But one day Visrava saw a nymph rise from the foam of the ocean. Poor wretch, he did not know that she was Nikassa, the daughter of the Titan Sumali, who had risen above the waters, at the instigation of her father, to seduce Lanka's king. Sumali had said, 'I am growing old, too old even for a Titan. I shall soon die. Since I cannot reconquer Lanka, go thou, Nikassa, and conquer it for my descendants. Charm Visrava by thy beauty, for a sense of beauty is his only weakness. Make him wed thee and thy children will become Lanka's lawful kings.' Saying these words, the aged monster died. To fulfil her father's last wish, Nikassa put on the pearls of the ocean bed, strings of coral, and moon-stones which the moon makes in daytime in the caverns of the sea. She wore purple enchantment for dress and on her face, she put the magic of deceit. As she trod the iridescent waves at dawn, the King Visrava thought she was a nymph from Paradise. She moved towards him. Beauty spread a sapphire path wherever she trod. Even a Divinity can be deceived. So was Visrava.

"He made Nikassa his wife, and in time, she gave birth to two monsters, Ravana and Kumbha Karna. But as if the Titan strain had run its course, their third child was a small celestial whom they named Bivisana, the righteous and divine, and last of all was born a beautiful daughter, her mother's very image—Surpanakha—and like her, devoid of sweetness, as all

Titan women must be. On Nikassa's death, their father abandoned earth and returned to Heaven and Ravana ascended the throne of Lanka. He bade the Titans return from their exile in the sea and made them his vassals and chieftains. But Ravana and his two brothers did not stop there. They began to practise harsh religious austerity which was no doubt an inheritance from their father. Only the celestial in any man inspires him to love religion and practise its hard teachings. The Creator was so pleased to see their spiritual zeal that he said, 'Ask any boon and I will grant it.' 'Make us immortal,' begged Ravana, but the Lord said, 'That which is born must die. Hadst thou and thy brothers avoided birth, I could have saved thee from death. Ask something else, O zealous Ravana.'

" 'Make me ruler of the heavens, too,' requested the monster. 'Give me ten heads to think with and twenty arms for fighting.'

" 'So be it,' said the Supreme. Then Kumbha Karna, the second one, begged, 'I wish to sleep without dying.' 'But too much sleep is as good as death,' explained the Almighty.

" 'I am willing to wake if, for recompense, I am made immortal for one day.'

" 'That one day no one can kill thee,' granted the Lord. 'But how to regulate thy sleep?'

"Kumbha Karna answered, 'One day in six months.'

" 'It shall balance itself thus,' announced the Eternal

Spirit. 'If someone rouses Kumbha Karna before the half year, then he mortal shall be. Take heed, do not wake until thou hast slept one hundred and eighty-two and a half days each time. If thou art roused even a moment too early, I shall revoke my gift of immortality, and any mortal shall be able to slay thee.'

" 'So be it!' ejaculated the Titan, already falling asleep.

"Now the Lord faced the third brother: 'What is thy wish?' Bivisana answered, 'May I serve God in any form at any time?'

" 'Thy boon is granted. Besides, O noble Bivisana, I, God, will be born in human form shortly and shall prove thy sincerity.' Hardly had the soul-ravishing music of God's words died away, when the Lord vanished from sight, and the three brothers descended to the streets of Lanka. Kumbha Karna stepped along, groggy with sleep.

"Six months later when Kumbha Karna rose from his sleep, Ravana took advantage of his immortality and declared war on the celestials. Kumbha Karna, the immortal, helped him. Together, they extended their dominion to the foot of the highest Heaven and made Indra and his brothers slaves. From that day on, the deities served the monsters of Lanka. The terrible Rakshasas now toiled not, nor reaped. The gods did all the work while they, though not divine, ate and drank with a freedom hitherto unsurpassed by gods, demigods and fairies."

The end of Pavana's recital found Hanuman almost choking with indignation.

He demanded: "How can this infamy heaped upon you by Ravana be erased? Can the gods fight no more?"

Pavana answered calmly: "As gods, we are powerless! So we have decided to ask the help of men and monkeys. They alone can withstand the onslaught of Ravana, for he has no complete mastery over men and monkeys."

"But what are men, and where are they?" Hanuman asked impatiently.

"The men who are to come to our assistance are growing in strength in Ayodhya: they are Rama and Lakshmana, the two brothers, and Sita, the wife of Rama. . . . Ho, I have spoken enough. You must be hungry—it is well nigh the hour of sunset. Eat and drink ye now, ere the world is plunged into darkness."

"But I wish to know of these men and Sita," Hanuman begged.

So eager was the youth to learn of them that he readily gave up his evening meal.

Desirous of pleasing his son, the God of Storms spoke briefly of his future allies: Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita:

"Soon after our downfall, when we had earned a holiday—a short reprieve from our servitude—we slunk out of Lanka and flew to the highest summit of the universe, the summit of supreme sanctity where dwells God, the creator of the gods and the demons. There

we fell on our faces and prayed to Him to end our humiliation. At last, hearkening to our devotion, the Lord granted us this boon: 'O ye Gods, ye have suffered enough; ye shall now be freed from the monster's toils. But since no god nor demigod can kill Ravana, for he knows their arts and artifices, I myself must be born as man in order to destroy his dominion. Man he despises, so that he has never learned what dwells in man's heart. Beasts, too, such as monkeys, those near-men, he has not understood. Therefore, let us take those shapes which his arrogance ignores.

" 'In order to put an end to him and his hundreds of thousands of goblins, trolls, gnomes and demigod followers, we must rear a vast army of our own. You will be that vast army, reborn as monkeys, that I, in the human form of Rama, shall lead against Ravana and his two brothers. But know also this, that once we are born in the forms of ape and man, we shall not remember what is now passing in Heaven. Like all mortals, we shall depend on chance to bring us together. May we seek each other out successfully, may you as monkeys make good soldiers, quick to attack and slow to retreat! May I as man have wisdom and will enough to lead you into Lanka and victory!

" 'Go forth now into the mortal world. Choose the jungle of Southern India and incarnate yourselves as sons of the apes and baboons that live there. Farewell!'

"Soon, in the jungles of Southern India, monkey-mothers gave birth to sons so luminous that they

Monkey mothers gave birth to sons so luminous that they shamed the sun.

shamed the sun shining by day and the stars that caparison the black stallion of night. Not only was their beauty great, but their prowess, too, surpassed the measuring of our mind. There was born an ape, Vali, who at birth was vast as a blue hill and beauteous as the lightning-garlanded cloud, and who was none other than Indra incarnated as monkey. Sugriva, his brother, bright as the snow-haired peak was the Sun-god capering from branch to branch. And next to those two in grandeur, are you, Hanuman. In your monkey-frame, you are hard as adamant, fleeter than Garuda, the thunder-bird, and your judgment is clear-swift as the lightning. Then was incarnated Jambuban, the god of wisdom, half bear and half ape. As a monkey he looks too foolish to be wise and as a bear too sleepy to have any brains. That gives him a double disguise under which he hides his identity. After him, followed gods assuming the form of other near-men; and their numbers grew so large that even the forest leaves were fewer than they.

"All are endowed with unbelievable strength and miraculous powers. Being gods, they can shrink at will to the size of a mouse or expand into that of a mountain. No matter how small or large a monkey, each one is like a lion in pride, a panther in agility. Their nails and teeth are sharper than swords. They can move large mountains as men move bricks; they crush tall trees between their palms as a child breaks a reed. Thus, unknown to Ravana, Lanka's monster king,

grows a vast army of monkeys, exercising and drilling themselves into phalanxes and cohorts of victory.

"In the meantime, in the house of Dasaratha, the king of men of Ayodhya (Northern India), his three queens gave birth to four sons. The eldest of these was Rama—Vishnu in human form. He was born of Kausalya, the good; the second son, Bharata, was born of Kaikeyi, the wicked, and the twins, Lakshmana and Satrughna, of Sumitra, the sweet. From birth, Lakshmana attached himself to Rama and Satrughna to Bharata, and they were like shadows that cling to substance. And the four brothers grew as the augmenting digits of the moon."

CHAPTER VII

A GOOD ACT

THAT night Hanuman did not sleep soundly. He dreamt of his destiny. "Hanuman, the liberator" —those words seemed to become the beat of his blood and the throb of his heart.

In dream he crossed leagues of blue water. Like a winged lion, he leaped back and forth past the sun, and to crown all, in a war lasting fourteen years, he slew innumerable monsters of incredible size and shape.

The next morning, finding him sleepy and haggard, his mother said, "Enough of one's destiny. Believe this, my son: your destiny has become your very character since last night. Now the wisest course for you to follow is to be unaware of it. Do forget it. The health of your soul demands that you achieve your end unconsciously. There is a serious problem facing us. Our

woods are running short of fruits. Let us ask your father to locate a new pasture in order to lead us thither."

Pavana, who had overheard those words, said laughingly, "Ha, I forgot that you have not had any food since yesterday. I shall find you fruits in abundance. Let me search for orchards that will surfeit your appetite."

In a moment he had resumed his form of a god. Without another word, Storm leaped past the deodars, the laurels, the tamarind, the palm, and the far-spread plane trees. The roar of his going decreased into lesser noises. Its last low tones hummed afar like a hive of bees in flight.

Left to themselves, the two little monkeys looked at the immensity of the woods with new eyes, as it were. Loneliness and awe seized their minds. No matter what they beheld, they saw in it something haughty and aloof. Hanuman, whose nerves were frayed, felt very suspicious of every sound.

In a moment, as if to warn him of danger, ghastly cries rent the morning air. It was the shriek of a mother monkey on a neighbouring tree.

What did he see? A mother monkey with her baby was being cornered on a tree by a leopard. The spotted cat was driving them forward to the weakest end of a bough whence he hoped to make the mother and the child fall to the floor of the jungle, in order to pounce upon them without any difficulty. Now finding her-

self on the verge of falling off the bough, she shrieked for help. This roused the anger of the leopard. He shot forth a paw like a javelin, and created a panic. The mother monkey threw down her baby, and then sprang after it to the earth.

The same moment Hanuman, too, had rushed down to the ground in order to bring them succour. This the cat had not seen, so when he followed his prey, he landed on Hanuman instead of falling on the mother monkey. This enabled the mother to pick up her baby who was several yards away, and make good her escape up another tree.

Stripped of his prey, the leopard grew blind with fury. He fought Hanuman, tooth and nail. The son of Storm hit back with his fists. The forest boomed with the thunder of his blows. The leopard was so large that with his jaws he easily encompassed his opponent's waist between them. Then he proceeded to bury his scorching fangs into the monkey.

The latter began to swell in size. This went well with his frame, save in the middle. There was no chance of its expanding, so great was the power of the cat's grip.

No doubt, he would have seemed ludicrous to himself the most, if by a miracle a mirror had been placed before his eyes. His waist was small as a hound's while his legs were long as two palm trees, and the rest of him became immense as a cathedral.

Though his middle felt cramped, his arms and tail

were ready to do even the impossible. Suddenly, he flung his tail upward like a lasso, then coiled it around the throat of his enemy. This produced its desired effect. The cat opened his mouth, gasped for breath, then expired.

After flinging the dead cat far away, Hanuman went to a slender rill near by to wash himself. What he saw in that water puzzled his poor animal mind. He seemed to have grown twice his original size.

"How has this come about?" he asked himself.

His sluggish brain reminded him of his magic power. Instead of resuming his original size of a langur, he decided to keep his present stature.

After his bath, he heard the roar of his father's return in the autumn-tinted forest. In order to salute him, Hanuman leaped to the top of a palm and hailed him. Not surprised at the size of his son, the god said, "It is natural that you should maintain the stature you wish. You are descended from the immortals. It is natural that you should use your powers, as you fancy."

Now turning to his wife, Pavana said, "Not far from here in a land of fairies, I have laid low a whole forest of bananas. I shall take you there. You, and especially Hanuman, deserve to eat good fruits in abundance."

CHAPTER VIII

HANUMAN KILLS A GIANT

AFTER eating all the best bananas in the forest of the fairies, Hanuman asked his father, "If you are enslaved in Lanka, how is it that you roam freely through the world?"

"That is the saddest part of our humiliation, my son," Pavana complained bitterly. "We are allowed to run the business of this world as if we were its masters. We do it as servants of Ravana. For instance, the Sun-

god shines here all day, but at night he is not allowed to rest. Ravana compels him to shine on Lanka every night. I who am with you now am listening with my inner ear to Ravana. Any moment he may cancel my vacation. All the sounds and echoes of which I alone am the master are ordered to bring to me instantly the commands of the ten-headed King across the sea. It is abject, our servitude to the monster. Grow up fast, my son, to liberate me, thy sire! Make me a promise—you will keep the story of your destiny a secret."

"Indeed, I shall," roared Hanuman mightily. "I shall do what is ordained in the manner of one who knows naught of his destiny."

That instant a mocking laughter broke out near them. It came from a tall tree. It made the Wind-god tremble as a dove at the wing-beats of a hawk. Hanuman, though a mere child, seemed to understand its import. Now the noise instead of dying down with its first outburst seemed to swell into a louder guffaw, more mocking than ever.

Pavana exclaimed, "O my son, under that sinister noise, I perceive a spy from Lanka. One of Ravana's spies has detected us. Ere he goes back to Lanka with the information that you are my son, you must kill him. For it is the law of the universe that no one save man, and those near-men, the monkeys, can destroy such fiends. Though immortal, I am powerless before him. Behold, there he is, behind that tree, on the ground. Hasten, slay him!"

Scarcely had his father pointed at the enemy, when Hanuman darted at him. In another moment he landed on a monstrous being. This surprised him not a little. Who would not be startled, if he were to find himself suddenly on the back of a buffalo whose head was shaped like a lion's, and who spoke the language of the gods, men and monkeys?

With one hand Hanuman smote him on the neck a blow fit to break it, while with the other, he gripped his ear.

"Who are you, speak!" he demanded.

"I am Ravana's spy, keeping watch on his plotting servants, the gods. The past few days have enlightened me. I have overheard your father's entire story. I fly to Ceylon to inform my King."

"Thou never shalt," roared Hanuman.

But, lo, the spy was already moving southward in great haste. His move was sudden and swift. Its shock threw Hanuman off. But more agile than his cunning foe, the young monkey sprang after him. He flew through the air, outracing the Rakshasa as the lightning outstrips a hawk.

Ere the Wind-god could count twenty, he saw Hanuman descend to the ground ahead of the enemy, shouting, "You shall taste death from these hands, I bar thy path, thou coward."

Without another word, he pulled down a tree. The monster charged. Hanuman leaped in the air in order to dodge him, and then, from above, suddenly struck

at his neck. Though with his increasing size, his weight, too, had increased, the force of his blow had no effect on his enemy. The latter ran on and on to the south.

As if to dig a goad into himself, Hanuman's soul exclaimed to his body, "If that horrible shape escapes to the seashore and jumps across to Ceylon, he will inform Ravana of what my father and I have been plotting. This cannot be permitted. Kill him I must! I will leap ahead of him and block his path."

Without tarrying, he flew far ahead of the monster, then alighted on a chosen spot. Wielding the tree in his hand like an axe, he began to beat down a whole forest of trees. Long before the fiend could reach this spot, his path was blocked by felled timber, high as the sky.

But, unafraid, the fiend lowered his head and charged into it. His strength and the violence of his butting shot him halfway through the high barricade. But no more! He was caught in the middle under the mountainous timber.

Hanuman realised that his enemy was caught securely. Flinging away his weapon from his hands, he struck his adversary on the head with his fists. Blow on blow fell like strokes of thunder. As if that was not enough, Hanuman now looped his tail around the demon's neck. As the tail tightened like a noose, the fiend screamed in agony. Soon, even this he could not do. The squeezing grew harder and harder, till it

crushed the soul out of his body. Thus, Hanuman prevented the spy's reaching Lanka.

On his return to his parents, his father proudly remarked, "Behold, O thou magnitude of Power, thou hast slain thy first monster. This is indeed a noble beginning for thy career. From now on thou shalt do everything singly. Thou needest not the help of thy parents. Thou art fully grown."

Here Anjana interrupted her husband, "If the youth must go forward singly, he must be told of the mystery of the Earth-goddess."

Seeing that Pavana was not yet able to comprehend her meaning, Anjana went into some details, "No youth born of a god can go forth alone until his father has taken him on a pilgrimage to the Tree of Life and the goddess Earth, the Mother of all."

Having understood her, the god exclaimed, "Indeed that pilgrimage has to be done. Besides, Hanuman must know human beings with whom his destiny is forever bound. Before I lead him to the Tree of Life in the Himalayas, we must fling him into the company of man."

Hanuman added eagerly, "Where can I find a man?"

His father answered, "My clairvoyance reveals that a little to the north of here, men come to hunt. You can see them there. Take care not to be trapped by them."

"Can you not take me yonder?" requested the youth. "Show man to me, O my father."

"Alas, not now," responded Pavana. "My holiday is over. My inner ear tells me that Ravana is calling. I must hasten to Lanka."

Quick to carry out what his lips had spoken, the Wind-god set out for the south. He flew very fast. The rush of his flight made the beams of the setting sun tremble like tattered banners in the sky.

CHAPTER IX

KING HANUMAN

THE next day Hanuman and Anjana returned to the flocks of monkeys on the bank of the river Kurmika. The people acclaimed Hanuman's coming. Every family vied with every other to show him their gratitude.

Although he accepted their adulation with courtesy, Anjana's offspring was not swept away by it. He went about his business as if he were the commonest of monkeys. This display of unconcern on his part brought him further attention and appreciation. At last, the monkeys came in a body to proclaim him their King. Imagine a whole forest of monkeys chattering and screaming in order to acclaim their newly

crowned monarch! The noise was so loud that it reached the stars.

Soon after he had accepted the crown, Hanuman decided to show his mettle. His first step revealed that he meant his royal commands to be carried out eventually. First of all, he made the old monkeys teach the young ones caution and concentration. The elders of the community resented this.

They said, "Our young learn by instinct. Why should we weary ourselves by teaching them?"

The King said in a drum-deep voice, "That way they do not learn much. I order you to obey my wishes. Be good enough to be at your schools on the morrow."

Now the monkey boys came in a crowd, pleading to be excused from school.

To them his Majesty answered, "You are not ordinary monkeys. You are demigods. Do behave like demigods. Go to school to acquire skill in sport."

The word sport set fire to the fancy-fecund minds of the langurs and the baboons.

"Long live Hanuman!" they cheered many times.

Then they gladly ran to their schools.

After settling the question of education, the King took up the problem of sanitation. He ordered all his subjects to bathe downstream so that their drinking water, taken upstream, could remain pure and healthy. This almost led to a rebellion.

All the monkeys shouted, "We have drunk where we liked and eaten whatever we wanted. Why should

we give up our liberty?" They stuttered in protest, "Cha, cha, cha——"

Hanuman saw now that he was dealing with a dangerous situation. So he decided to deceive the monkeys in order to do them good. In a few days' time all the monkey mothers were invited to dine with the King's mother. The Lady Anjana fed her guests sumptuously. They had apples from the Nilgiris, the sweetest of their kind; bananas from Bengal, lush and fat; grapes from Ganzai, sweet and purple like well-cut amethysts; oranges, seedless and full of sap; Guava pears dripping with honey in their hearts; berries of all kinds; then, that queen of fruits, mango, the nectar-defeating. Last of all, they had comb-honey, cold as ice.

After such a feast, all the invited guests were told of the benefits of good sanitation. Anjana narrated to them all kinds of legends regarding health. It was a unique event. Until then, the females of the Kurmika monkeys had never heard such stories. Also, what Anjana told them of the diseases caused by bad food and drink frightened them exceedingly.

A few days later, another feast and conference took place. Again, the ladies were informed that diseases that kill children are hatched in the water where monkeys bathe. If the infants drank water in which the others had bathed, they were bound to be ill.

After about a dozen conferences, the female monkeys went on a strike, declaring, "Our men-folk must obey the new rule of the King. They must bathe down-

stream and never upstream, where our children drink water. Until they do what we wish, we shall neglect our duties."

The fiat of the female population acted like a lash on the minds of the male monkeys. In a very short time, all the subjects took to observing the strictest rules of sanitation. This was a triumph of statesmanship.

Hanuman pitted the mothers of his kingdom against the fathers just long enough to bring the latter around to his way of thinking. Of his wise sayings, one which has come down to our time, runs thus: "He who wins the unanimous support of the women will bring their husbands to submission."

Though he put through many wise measures, there were two he could not carry out, for the time being: namely, teaching the monkeys how to drink in the same fashion as men do and the art of making fire. He gave his subjects all kinds of prizes and other inducements. Yet, no matter what he did, they refused to learn. This saddened the King's heart considerably. He did not know what to do. He thought of abdicating, but this his subjects would not permit. Brought to his wits' end, he sent a message to his father, asking for guidance.

In a few days the god came as a hawk to his nest. When Hanuman spoke to him of his problems, the god said: "It is very easy, my son. Why not capture a few human beings who come to hunt north of your king-

dom? Bring them here. Set a price on their liberty: namely, that they must teach at least six monkeys how to drink and how to make fire as men do."

"But, Father, I can not capture men like baboons," Hanuman protested.

Pavana turned to Anjana: "Then I shall do it."

She nodded her agreement. "But how?" she wished to know.

Before answering, Pavana uttered a laugh which sounded like golden chords hit with a steel hammer.

"Your laughter is always pleasing," Hanuman said in a peevish tone, "but it does not tell us much."

Pavana grimaced in mock annoyance, and then added, "I will go hence on the morrow in order to fetch two men here. Trust me, O my son."

On the morrow, long before Hanuman was awake, Pavana flew north swifter than the swiftest flight of thought. There, he located a banyan tree on which slept two hunters on platforms made of planks. Without disturbing them, the god uprooted the vast banyan, as a child lifts a feather. Then, holding it aloft, he flew southward with a gentle motion of his dawn-drenched wings. The sleepers, rocked by the lazy rhythm of their flight, slept most peacefully.

In time, Pavana reached his destination and held the tree before Hanuman who was walking on his palace roof.

"Behold," the god shouted, "your two men, my son."

Without another word, he shook the two fellows off

the tree, as if they were ripe fruits. Fortunately, Hanuman stretched out his two arms and received the captives. Instead of falling on their heads against the roof, they lay in the mighty arms of the monkey and trembled with fear and surprise.

After putting them down gently on their feet, Hanuman exclaimed, "So these are men!"

"Indeed we are!" said one of them.

"But who are you who saved us? Where are we?" demanded the second man.

After flinging away the tree, Pavana landed on the roof and folded his wings. He spoke for Hanuman: "You are in the presence of the monkey-king, Hanuman. I am the God of Winds. I brought you here to teach the monkeys of this kingdom how to make fire, and how to drink water, as you do."

"But how can we teach monkeys?" wondered the two hunters.

Hanuman explained, "My people understand human languages because most of them are demigods in monkey bodies. They are masters of many tongues. Surprising as it may seem, though they are demigods, they are helpless as monkeys, when it comes to making fire, for instance. They flee in abject terror from the very sight of fire. Can you teach us the art of flame-kindling? Teaching it will be the price of your freedom."

The two hunters spoke to each other. The first one said, "Now, Hantara, what do you think of it?"

The second answered, "My friend, Byadha, there is no way out but teaching them. We are prisoners of demigods."

Hantara turned to the King to explain, "Your Majesty, we will teach your people. Permit me now to introduce ourselves to your royal presence: I am Hantara, the hunter, and he is my friend, Byadha, the great magician of India. We need a suitable place to live and a quiet spot to teach your people. If you will be so kind as to send us to our quarters, we shall wash ourselves."

Hanuman responded with great magnanimity, "You shall stay here with me in my palace. Can you teach me as your first pupil?"

CHAPTER X

THE ART OF FIRE

AFTER a whole week spent in watching Hanuman study fire-making, the god of storms left for Ceylon, for his holiday had come to its end. There was another reason for his going: he could not grasp why Hanuman feared the fire so. This fear concealed from Hantara and Byadha was known to his father whose divine eyes read the terror that abode in Hanuman's heart. Unable to bear the sight of so much terror within his own child, the god fled to Lanka.

Hanuman was too occupied to reason out his fear.

He attributed his inability to learn fire-making to slowness of mind.

One sundown, when Hantara and Byadha were exceedingly exasperated at his stupid mind, they said, "Your Majesty, there is something else gone wrong. It is not your brain that fails. It is your heart."

Hanuman asked, "What do you see in my heart?"

Byadha explained, "There is no way of learning any magic, when the heart is troubled. Search your heart; locate the root of your trouble there. Then, root it out."

That night before saying good night to his mother, Hanuman confessed to her his difficulties: "My heart gets panic-crazed at the sight of fire. How can I learn to make it?"

Anjana thought a while; then she gave this advice: "It is the monkey in you who is afraid. But you are not a monkey, my son. You are descended of the gods. Both sides of your family are divine. Agni, the god of fire, is your cousin. How can you be afraid of his contact? Meditate! Say to yourself a hundred times before going to sleep, 'I am a divinity masquerading as an animal. I am full of divinity. My heart is the very nest of Godlike calm!' Go to your room and repeat these words till you fall asleep."

Those wise words Hanuman repeated for a hundred times before going to sleep. The following night he did the same.

It was about the ninth evening that the force of his

meditation grew so powerful as to wash all fear out of his blood, brain and soul.

On the tenth day, when he approached Byadha and Hantara, the former said, "Your Majesty looks like a god. Today you shall compel success."

Without another word they prayed in unison to Agni:

> "O God of Fire, be propitious unto us.
> O thou Radiance, seat thyself beside us.
> Quicken our senses, make them perfect;
> Steady our minds and free them of unrest.
> May our tongues drip with the honey of eloquence.
> Quicken our hands;
> Be propitious, be propitious unto us!"

Hanuman now began to strike wood on wood with fury and determination. His eyes glowed like the sun at dawn. His ears became deaf to all sounds. His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. Thought like a rapier of diamond goaded his zeal. And it seemed that courage, instead of blood, tingled through his veins.

Yet an hour passed and gave no result. The wood would not burn. Here Hantara and Byadha made him rest a while. The second hour, too, Hanuman toiled, and, alas, fruitlessly. The third hour repeated the barrenness of the other two.

To himself he addressed this speech: "I shall kindle these logs, even if they burn me. I do not care, even if I am turned into cinders."

With renewed strength, he struck one log against the other. One, two, three, four; he struck them faster and faster, till it sounded like the continuous drumming of thunder. Relentlessly, he toiled hour after hour. The sun passed its zenith. Slowly the day stooped lower and lower, till it lay on the bier of night. The moon rose, blanching the world.

Yet Hanuman would not yield the palm to defeat. He wrought like Vishawakarma, the forger of thunderbolts. Towards midnight, a strange sensation of peace passed through him, washing away the last vestige of fear that had been lurking in his brain and preventing success. As a corpse is carried away by a flood, streams of perspiration bore his terror of fire out of his body.

Now his soul grew apathetic. He did not care whether he triumphed or not. All the same his hands, as if they were not his, went on striking wood upon wood till it smoked and ignited.

"Agni, God of Fire!" exclaimed the lord of monkeys.

As if he had heard Hanuman's call, the flame began to grow taller and taller. It rose heavenward to the wisps of the clouds. After devouring them, it passed into the higher spaces, and beyond these into the silence of the ether where floated the orb of night. Lest it set fire to the universe, the moon barred its path

and set to quench it. That instant it burned a portion of that luminary.

Though suffering grievously, the merciful divinity blew an icy breath upon Hanuman's logs, wiping out the flame as if it had never been. Alas, that act of mercy cost the moon its beauty. Even now one can see on its silver disc those black marks caused by the fire.

A sense of sadness spread through Hanuman's soul. He was not sure that he could recapture that flame.

Like a bolt from a clear sky, he heard the moon cursing him. "Now that you have blackened my face, in the future your visage, too, will be burnt and blackened."

After a pause, the voice added, "So be it, so be it, so be it!"

And so it came to pass that even today in India, you can see Hanuman's descendants bearing the mark of the curse. Though their bodies are tawny gray, their faces are black as charcoal.

CHAPTER XI

HANUMAN IMPROVES UPON MAN

AFTER he had mastered the art of Pramanthan, or making fire by striking wood on wood, the King sent forth Hantara and Byadha to teach his subjects.

Though they slept at night in the royal palace, the two men spent their days among the commoner monkeys of the realm. During their absence, Hanuman experimented on a way of making fire more easily than by striking long pieces of timber on one another. He thought of producing the flame by striking a metal on a rock. Alas, he failed almost invariably, no matter what he tried.

One day, completely downhearted, he begged for his mother's advice: "You, who are versed in the ways of men and gods, you alone can guide me."

To comfort his dejected spirit, Anjana readily spoke

of the source to which he should go: "You must go to the maker of fire in the sky, the Thunder-god."

"But how can I reach and speak to the Thunder-god?" Hanuman wished to be instructed. "Instruct me, please."

"That is easy," Anjana assured him. "During a thunderstorm, leap up to the sky and see the way he, the Thunder, ignites his bolts."

"But would not the bolt scorch me?" Hanuman asked with trepidation.

"That it can not, if you approach the god in the right spirit and from the proper direction." Anjana instructed him further, "Pray to him day after day—'yat te Dakshinam Mookhum'—withdraw your scorching fury; protect me with thy mercy, O solitary wanderer. If you pray, he will answer your prayer."

Every morning for over a month, Hanuman prayed to the Thunder, the solitary wanderer. This happened to be the period of drought in India.

Exactly on the fortieth daybreak as Hanuman had finished his prayer, the July cloud rose in the south. "As an elephant strikes a mound with its tusks, the black cloud smote the turquoise precipices of Heaven with its lightning."

Drawn irresistibly by the sight of the god, Hanuman sprang to the sky. At home in the air, like a wild swan, he flew higher and higher. He passed flocks of celestial birds sailing on wings that glittered like rainbows, and geese of moon-shaming radiance flocked past him.

Herons of crystal, and humming birds, and kingfishers stabbed his sight with their splendour.

Today he had no eyes for them. He wanted to circle round the storm in order to reach the presence of Bajra, Thunder. Led rather by a sure instinct than by ideas, he leaped over the cloud crest and ran right into the arms of a storm.

"What are you doing here?" he heard a familiar voice ask.

"Father!" exclaimed Hanuman stirred with affection. "What are you doing?"

"If you want to help me," spoke Pavana in a matter-of-fact tone, "sit on my back and blow on these clouds. They are slow as a herd of goats. I seem not to push them very fast. Maybe our two breaths will hasten them northward."

Hanuman did as he was told. And after the clouds had begun to move very fast, he confided to his father the purpose of his errand, "Where can I find that God of Thunder?"

Pavana answered, "Thunder dwells on the summit of ether, a few miles up. Spring up to him and ask him in my name to tell you of his secret. He is your uncle, my brother. Vault upwards. . . . Yes, I am going down . . . to convey to your mother the fact that I have seen you safely sailing on."

Hanuman leaped off his father's back and then was lost to hearing and sight. He pushed forward with so much force that in a short while, he stood tiptoe on the

argent peaks of ether, where he beheld Vishwakarma, the god, more luminous than Jupiter, striking a piece of metal with a thing like a stone. And the flying sparks zigzagged past the clouds that Pavana was hurling forward.

Humbly bowing to the god, he made himself and his mission known. His sincerity convinced Vishwakarma. Without another word, the divine one placed in the youth's hands the subtler secret of fire and electricity, remarking, "Teach them how to strike metal on stone. This will make the daily creation of hearth-fire very easy. But the other they must dream of for centuries to come. Some day their dreams and those of their descendants will come true, making mankind master of the bolt of the gods. Remember, my son, electricity they must dream about."

After bowing to him with deep gratitude, Hanuman took leave and flew away from the nest of Thunder. On his arrival home at sundown, he found his father and mother holding conversation on the palace roof with Hantara and Byadha.

The latter was saying: "Now that a score of monkeys have learned to make fire and a hundred, at least, know how to drink water in human fashion, you will take us home, O great God of Storms. We beg you to ask King Hanuman to set us free."

Just at this moment, the King landed near by. "You shall be free," Hanuman proclaimed to the two teach-

ers. "Besides, you shall take with you the instruments by which fire can be made most conveniently."

Within a week's time, after fully acquiring the art of making not only fire, but also lightning sparks, Hantara and Byadha went home to teach mankind those arts. The new method of making fire proved to be a great improvement over the older one. This mankind owes to Hanuman.

CHAPTER XII

THE MOTHER EARTH AND THE TREE OF LIFE

AFTER his two human teachers had taken their leave, Hanuman was urged by Anjana to pay a visit to the Himalayas where in an ancient cavern abode the Goddess Earth.

Anjana explained further: "It is she, the Mother Earth, who is the one who creates and cradles the Earth-gods. I am one of her daughters. You are her grandson. Go on a pilgrimage to the great Mother. For, I believe, she will give the secret of a magic."

Hanuman asked: "Can I go suddenly on such a journey? Would she impart to me her magic, if I arrive without a warning?"

Anjana explained: "Now that you have mastered the magic of thunder-making, which comes from the sky, you must beg for the magic which is the unique art of the earth.

"While you were saying farewell to your two human masters, I went and consulted your father who wishes to take you to the Tree of Life in the Himalayas and thence to the home of Mother Earth."

Later, that day, when Hanuman was alone with his sire, Pavana said: "If my prophetic vision does not deceive me, I perceive not many years hence, during a great war, you going to the Tree of Life, which mankind calls the Herb of Healing. I may not be with you then to show the way. Now that I have the time, I shall gladly take you north and usher you to the presence of Mother Earth."

"Do we go tonight?" Hanuman asked eagerly.

"Yes, through the dustless path of the stars," Pavana answered.

The gods and monkeys differ from men in this: when they wish to do a thing, they carry it out without wasting many words.

At sunset Pavana and his son sprang to the sky. It took them only several minutes to reach the zone of ether.

In the silence of the upper air, the god remarked: "I

want to communicate to you the turns that our path will take."

"I am all attention, Father," responded Hanuman.

"First of all, we fly north to Vindhya Hill which rises to the sky, separating southern India from the plains of the Ganges. We shall traverse the holy river's valley by the city of Benares. A thousand miles farther north are the highest hills.

"When we reach the Himalayas where the Ganges rises and falls 'like a flight of silver stairs from Heaven at dawn,' we shall go by Alaka—the home of the Gods. Then eastward we shall go where grows the Tree of Life, a twig of which can restore a dying or dead man to life. Men call this the Herb of Healing."

Without uttering another syllable, the maker of tempests bent his head and flew with unheard-of swiftness. The sound of his wings reverberated through the highest haunts of the stars. This acted like a challenge to Hanuman, who lashed his tail, long as the orbit of the moon, and hurled himself forward.

The stars streamed by them like frightened doves. The nebula of Andromeda; that silver stream, the Milky Way; Capella and Orion seemed motionless compared with the fury of their movement. The silence of the night became plangent with rushing sounds.

Suddenly, sweeping downwards, Pavana announced: "Behold, Benares, the holiest of cities, O my son."

Hanuman, who was keen to go on to the Himalayas,

begged: "Is there any reason, O divine Father, why we should see Benares now? Why not fly to the Himalayas, without wasting time? Is it not possible that if we give up tarrying here, we shall save time enough to reach the Himalayas sooner than we expected? Besides, I hope to make the whole journey thither and home within four and twenty hours."

"This bespeaks the nature of your body, my son. Like men and other monkeys, you are impatient."

Hanuman retorted, "Is it not wisdom to obey the urge of one's true nature? For example, yours—does it not drive you to make tempests?"

"Well spoken," exclaimed the father. "All the same, how can you go hundreds of miles and return in one day?"

"Permit us to try, Father," Hanuman requested humbly.

Before them lay Benares, spread like a jewelled tapestry. The rose and the white lights of the city broidered the amber-black stream of the Ganges. In streets that shone like jasper, thronged elephants, horses and men. Foot-soldiers wearing silver-dimming armours of steel, and masked in grotesque helmets, marched with the regularity of monstrous insects. Alas, all this meant almost nothing to our hero. He flew past the sacred town very fast.

In order to make his father hasten, the heroic monkey augmented his speed precipitately. Pavana, who had fallen behind, had to fly faster and faster.

Soon Benares sank from sight. They rose very high now, their heads almost touching Cassiopeia. They flew towards the West, almost touching Venus who vanished behind the Himalayas near Kashmere. Here they rounded the white peak Nungaparvat the unclad one—and took a course due east.

Half an hour more had passed, when Hanuman heard his father weeping, an event unheard and undreamt of. He felt unnerved. Who would not be, if he witnessed the bitter pride of an immortal?

Haltingly, he asked, "Father?"

"I weep over our lost home, my son," explained Pavana. "Lo, my tears are already dry. Permit me to describe that hill below, yonder. Can you see the gold ramparts of Alaka below us?"

"I think I see," mumbled Hanuman.

"Behold," explained the Wind-god, "the palaces of the Gods, now widowed of their glory. What malice of existence was it that made us captives and slaves of the monster Ravana of Lanka? Here are our own realms whose grottoes once hummed with the curling lapse of brooks; whose gardens were nightingale-tongued. Now silent like the holes of snakes in the winter! To the north of us rose the rainbow gates of Indra, the ruler of the radiant immortals. Gone now is its glory. The bow is faded as a peacock robbed of its fan. The unwinking light of the settingless sun is no more. Even a falling star shuns these regions, where abode and laughed the highborn gods."

As if to avoid hearing of the painful subject, Hanuman flew very fast, saying: "Sorrow not; a few years more will see the end of Ravana, and the release of the gods from his thralldom."

Now began the most difficult part of the journey—the circling round the horns and shoulders of Himadri, near Thibet. Though a god, Pavana panted and groaned with fatigue for a while. The height-humbling peaks seemed like a thick forest of mammoth icicles.

"I see!" he exclaimed suddenly in the thick darkness of the Kanchinjinga range. "Follow me."

There where hardly any life grows, where no man, nor beasts had ever climbed, our two voyagers alighted.

Slowly they descended where in an icebound cave grew the Tree of Life. It looked more like a subtle pattern of deeply woven designs than a tree. Man, birds, beasts, gods, insects, and minerals and flowers peered through the foliage which looked emerald and argent in turn. It was unbelievable!

At the foot of the tree, rose the river of joy, a warm milk-shaming stream, singing its way through dark declivities.

Compelled by the sanctity of the place, Pavana knelt before the Tree and paid his homage. Hanuman prayed and did worship, a keen feeling of gladness passing through his body.

After they had said their prayers, the boy asked: "Who guards over Life and this divine stream?"

Pavana whispered, "Mother Earth."

"Where is her abode?" whispered Hanuman.

"Afar, underground."

"When am I permitted to see her?" asked Hanuman.

"Come," urged Pavana.

They walked along the "milk-shaming river," skirting the Tree of Life, down to subterranean depths where glittered three nameless caves: haunts of diamond, pearl and platinum. At the farthest end of the platinum cave they came into a place barred with fast-locked gates of amethyst. Lo, the very sound of their footsteps seemed to push them open. As the doors gave way, both of them stepped to the other side, then fell hundreds of feet through fragrant warm air. They went past the springs of the rivers of the world, still deeper into the homes of most dazzling precious stones for which there is no name in human language. Passing on, they reached the radiant chamber of mystery at whose threshold Pavana did obeisance.

He whispered, "Here Mother Earth dwells," pushing his son forward.

Stepping forward, Hanuman cast a stealthy look.

Lo, he faced the Mother. Her eyes were brighter than an eagle's. Her face, almost too wrinkled with age, was more radiant than any child's. Her hands resting on her lap seemed flexible like an infant's but stronger than adamant. Her feet shod in crystal sandals radiated the white fire of holiness.

Hanuman bowed again and again before the sacred

feet, daring not to touch them, though longing to do so.

Having finished his task of ushering the young hero before the Presence, his sire made the courtesy of one immortal to another, then withdrew.

Now, face to face and alone in that awesome hush, the monkey unable to bear the gaze of the Mother shut his eyes. Hardly had he done so, when he felt a finger touching his forehead, opening his "third eye." A momentary sensation of pain seized him; following it, came an acute feeling of exaltation. Literally, an eye between his two eyes, just above his nose, had opened. And it was able to see! And what it saw, stunned his mind.

He beheld his own soul—a light burning with quenchless steadiness. Its glow "lifted the veil from the hidden beauty of the Universe."

Mother Earth spoke: "The good that will be yours, now that you have seen me, you can not foresee. Your mind will be free of memories, and your heart untroubled by hope. You shall live like the brook: it cleanses its shores daily, but with new water each time. Your soul has acquired the power to dominate your daily life.

"Your mind and your five senses will be washed with the flame that it shall pour on them every night while you sleep. Every dawn at the hour of awakening, you shall face the world with stainless mind."

The Earth stopped speaking. Hanuman's third eye shut itself, as it were, enabling him to open his ordinary eyes. These told him that he was gazing at the Mother, smiling upon him with tenderness.

Suddenly, he burst into speech: "Let me see it, my soul, once more. Please lift the lid from my inner vision."

"Not any more, at present," commanded the Mother most tenderly.

Those words of the Earth went into him like music. They were spoken in a tone of ineffable delicacy.

Voice of the Mother—how to compare it? It had been softened by the sorrows of centuries. It had fed on joys that no human mind can ever taste. The nightingale's song, the lion's roar, the owl's hoot, every woman's pain and every man's anguish, the winds on a long sea and the groan of a wounded beast—all struck their chords in that voice.

As if the more to hear that voice, than to ask a question, Hanuman begged: "But that third eye of mine just above my two ordinary eyes, when shall it open again? Tell me, O tell me!"

The question was answering itself from within him: "Twice in the future. Once when you shall meet Rama; a second time when you meet Sita." Now he received the secret of a new magic: "You are no more a monkey, my son. You can be a man any time you wish."

After bowing to the Mother's feet and kissing the

ground on which they rested, Hanuman rose to take his leave. As if unable to relinquish his gaze, he walked very slowly backwards out of the chamber of mystery.

No sooner had he stepped outside, than the strong winglike arms of Pavana bore him up to the top of the Himalayan peaks, piercing the heavens with their crystal horns at daybreak.

Without any delay they set out for the south. On their homeward journey, when they had passed Kashmere, Hanuman spoke for the first time: "Enlighten me, O my Father, with what weapons does Mother Earth guard that sacred Tree, which, you say, men call the Herb of Healing?"

"With her pure thoughts, my son," explained Pavana. "Thoughts are more powerful than even the thunder. They guard and protect it from all dangers."

"Her voice is the sweetest I have ever heard," exclaimed Hanuman.

Though now in full flight southwards, Pavana went on speaking: "My thought reads yours, Hanuman. Did you receive from the Mother that magic which enables a monkey to appear as man?"

"Yes," mumbled Hanuman whose voice seemed to resent the question asked by his clairvoyant father.

"That is the worst of us gods," expatiated Pavana. "We know all secrets, and we fathom the inmost depth of every heart."

That they had already travelled hundreds of miles,

became apparent to them, when they looked down. They were sweeping past the valleys where the Ganges discharges her sacred flood. In an hour they could espy the southern section of Benares, glittering like the palaces of the gods. These were the temples of the Father and Mother of the Universe. Their minarets, domes, towers and turrets roused reverence in the hearts of Pavana and Hanuman.

After saluting the sacred edifices by bowing their heads as they went past, the former said, "This kingdom knows how to build. It has dedicated the best of its architecture to God and not to men."

As the battlements of Benares vanished behind them, Hanuman asked, "When do we reach the Kingdom of the Monkeys?"

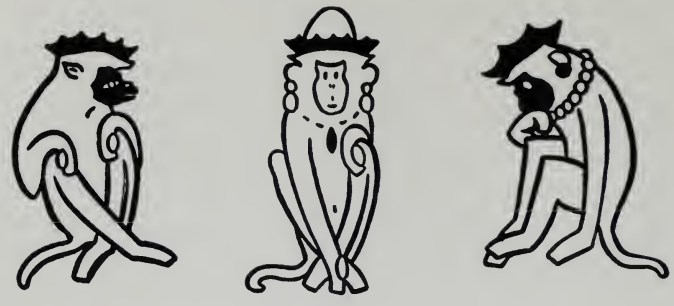
"In two hours, if we hasten," Pavana beat his diamond wings fiercely. The edge of his swiftness cut the horizon in two. Thus, leading his child, the Wind-god covered more than a thousand miles in an hour. Hanuman felt that he should race Pavana. Not a word said he, but with the agility of the lightning, he dove downward, zigzagged under, then passed ahead of his father.

"Ho, ho, ho!" Laughing fit to crack the sky into bits of broken glass, the latter sought to outrace the lad. He beat his wings till they seemed to slash the air with flames; he roared louder than a dozen thunders, and last of all he vaulted and skipped faster and faster. Even then, he could not pass Hanuman.

After making certain of his father's defeat and without fatiguing himself unduly, he said, "My sire, I have lost the way; I beg you to lead."

This seemed to heal the wounded pride of the defeated father. Assuming that his son had admitted himself vanquished, the God turned slightly eastward, as he took the lead.

They came upon the Kingdom of Hanuman before sundown. They had covered almost the entire length of India within four and twenty hours.



CHAPTER XIII

GUESTS AT THE DOOR

ON HIS return home, Hanuman was informed by Anjana that a royal personage accompanied by a friend had come and had asked for an interview with him. He was told that they were not baboons, but large apes from Kishkindha (modern Malabar).

Though Hanuman was curious to see their faces, he agreed with his parents that he should see them the next day.

As soon as Pavana and Hanuman had bathed and had eaten their evening meals, the one of ambrosia and the other of that fruit, mango, they described to Anjana their Himalayan travel in every important detail. All the same, there was one story of which no details were vouchsafed her. Hanuman could not bring himself to disclose his interview with Mother Earth. It was so sacred to him that even the thought of describing it seemed like a profanation.

That night, an hour after Hanuman had fallen asleep, Pavana seated under the light of stars, discoursed to his wife: "I have initiated the boy into the last mystery. I have nothing more to teach him. I shall go to Lanka now."

"Not for good!" exclaimed Anjana apprehensively.

"No. I shall return one more time to see Hanuman. After that he must forge his destiny singly, individually, alone. Do you understand?"

"I do, my Lord," was her cryptic answer.

"I must be in Lanka before sunrise," the god explained. "I hear Ravana calling me thither."

He went as he had come, unexpectedly.

The next day, when the hour came, Hanuman held court. The audience hall of the King was fashioned out of bamboo, more lustrous than emerald, and madrona, red as carnelian. The throne, made of carved ivory, seemed massive as a mastodon and delicate as a butterfly.

At Hanuman's approach, all the monkeys of the court rose and gave a mighty shout of joy, shaking the forest echoes into flights of shuddering sounds. Before the King had taken his accustomed seat, he led the usual ceremony of prayers and salutation. That over, Hanuman addressed himself to the many details of the state. It did not take him long to finish them. There was a good reason that the business of the state was readily transacted. Hanuman ruled his people so wisely as to have no need of a court of judges and of a police

force. The only business that ever came up was of education. On this matter the King was most insistent. He used to spend hours on this subject. By now, the department had been so well organised that it needed little attention.

As soon as the last item of his task had been finished, the herald announced the presence of two apes: Sugriva, a dethroned King, and Jambuban, his minister. From among the courtiers stood up two mighty shapes; the first named had a face like a man's and the second, that of a bear. They strode forward and bowed to the King.

Then Jambuban opened his "bear-mouth" and spoke: "I am but a friend and servant of King Sugriva who stands beside me. Only last week, he ruled millions of apes of Kishkindha. Now he and I come to you, O King, seeking refuge."

The speaker's voice seemed heavy with grief. In order not to continue with the embarrassing scene, Hanuman rose to his feet, saying, "The court is ended for the day."

In deep silence the courtiers rose and stood still as if they were a picture painted on the wall. Making his way through them, Hanuman led Sugriva and Jambuban out to his own chambers in the royal palace where Anjana was awaiting him.

When the strangers were presented to her, she said, "This palace is your home; stay with us, O royal prince."

"You may depend upon me," added Hanuman, "to fulfil my mother's words. It is meet that you should be our guest and honoured friend, as long as you choose. Our kingdom is given over to the simplest rule of hospitality: 'Cherish the stranger, for he may be God in disguise at your door.' "

Moving towards the inner apartments of the palace, Anjana remarked, "I shall order some cool refreshments for our guests; permit me to withdraw."

After she had made her exit, Hanuman informed Sugriva: "My mother, being clairvoyant, read your entire history in your face, O King."

Jambuban grunted like a bear: "Then you do not need to be told by us how my Lord lost his kingdom."

Then Sugriva said: "You can recount the sad events of my life another time. Those distressing facts are not pleasing to my hearing at this hour."

CHAPTER XIV

LAST PHASE OF BOYHOOD

HIS acquaintance with Hanuman's prowess and character won the admiration of King Sugriva. In a short time, the young monkey made a pledge of friendship for life to his royal guest.

Hanuman's new friendship kindled so much joy in Sugriva's heart that he said: "When I regain my throne, you will be my General. My friend, Jambuban, is really a sloth-bear. He acts with great deliberation. To balance this fellow's position in my cabinet, you, nimble Hanuman, must be my Minister of War."

Now that he had two enormous apes for friends, Hanuman undertook tasks that he had hitherto avoided as being too difficult. With their help, he began to build new engineering projects which had been necessary for his kingdom for many years. Besides building houses and making bridges over the rivers, the apes planned extensive systems of drainage.

Not only that, they also gave lectures on healing the sick, facts of which Hanuman's people had not heard. Knowledge of many herbs that cure diseases began to spread everywhere. This began to augment the health and stature of the people. In a short time, they grew strong and large as Sugriva, and some of them fancied themselves to be apes.

Apart from the sciences, Sugriva spent his energies in teaching young monkeys the subtler arts of courtliness and manners. Jambuban taught them how to think. Thus the two guests brought into Hanuman's life new elements of pleasure and profit. The more he learned from them, the greater grew his curiosity as to the origin of Sugriva and his companion. Every week he sought for a propitious moment when he could ask Jambuban the questions that were uppermost in his mind.

Since there rose no occasion which brought about the desired end, Hanuman one day asked his mother: "How can I learn the history of Sugriva?"

Anjana laughed with pleasure at such a simple question. However, in order to save him from his dilemma, she said: "Why do you hesitate to invite Jambuban to go hunting for a day with you? There in the solitude of a far-off forest he will narrate the details of Sugriva's history."

Anjana's suggestion seemed sound to him. The very next day he asked Jambuban to request his King's per-

mission for a hunting excursion. This matter of mere formality was readily arranged.

With Sugriva's permission, the bear-headed ape and Hanuman set out for the banks of a river called Cavery where mangoes, bananas, oranges, and apples grew in profusion.

On their journey southeastward, they skirted a corner of the Kingdom of Kishkindha whose forests were filled with apes and other large monkeys. The sight of them, though fleeting, made Hanuman sharpen his questions. All the same, he kept them in the case of his mind until after they had reached the fertile plains of the Cavery and had begun to dine sumptuously on fruits of fabulous sweetness.

Then, the young monkey asked, "Tell me, O knife-point of wisdom, of your life. Speak to me of your origin, of Sugriva's history, and of his downfall. But before all that, can you speak of your serenity, for you are always calm?"

Jambuban answered, smiling: "By studying the other monkeys, I learned to be serene. You see, I am forty years old. You are only a cub, dear Hanuman. If you live with monkeys long enough, you will find that their restlessness makes for rest in others. My father was the cosmic Bear, the Big Dipper, and my mother was a monkey. From the latter I acquired restlessness and curiosity; from the former, patience and vision. He sees the lodestar and forever adheres to its company. At night, when the sky is cloudless, I commune

with him. He can see far and wide, and communicates the results of his vision to me. I, in turn, make use of his information in administering the King's affairs. If occasionally Sugriva rejects my advice he is not insulting me, for the advice is not my own."

Jambuban suddenly stopped and put to Hanuman this question: "You asked many questions. Which of them do you wish me to answer? Towards what goal are you driving me?"

"Then," requested Hanuman, "answer me, please. How did Sugriva come to lose his throne?"

"Ah," Jambuban groaned, bear-fashion. "That will take time to tell. Look, the sun is setting. Let us go up a strong tree in order to say our evening prayers. After evensong, I shall tell the whole tale, withholding no detail. It will enable us to pass the night pleasantly."

Swiftly the day of the tropics passed into the vibrant silence of the night. The moon rose, quickening innumerable beasts of prey to their activity of destruction.

After making themselves comfortable on a high Asoka tree, the two friends prayed to God in silence for more than an hour. Their next devotional exercise consisted of a short prayer to the spirit of Ratri, night:

"You have looked into the hidden places of the world,
O Night.
Put to rest on pillows of repose, monkeys, men, and
cattle.

Put to rest the children on their mothers' hearts.
Homeward hast thou led the wanderer,
Homeward gone, even the restless hawks,
Even the fretful echoes are sleeping in their nest of hush.
Ward off all evils from every door;
Come, Night, come over the threshold of thy eastern silence,
Oh, come with peace.
Bring peace unto all that sleep;
Pour peace on those that roam peacelessly.
Peace, peace, peace!"

Now Jambuban plunged into the story that Hanuman was longing to hear.

"You probably do not realise that the person who took Sugriva's throne was his elder brother, Vali."

"No," exclaimed Hanuman. "It is Vali who sits on the throne of Kishkindha now."

Jambuban continued: "The real weakness of our monkey people is jealousy. We are jealous to a grievous degree. In your little kingdom, dear Hanuman, there is no such vice. Most exceptional for a realm of monkeys! Alas, over in Kishkindha envy seems to be the symbol of it."

"Strange," muttered Hanuman to himself.

"It is hard to make the story of Sugriva clear," commented Jambuban. "Why? Because it issues from the character of Vali, who in turn is the victim of his own impetuosity and courage."

Hanuman remarked impatiently: "Please begin with Vali."

Jambuban went on: "First of all, I must tell you of the prowess of Vali. He had just passed his twentieth year, when owing to the death of his uncle who had no issue, he inherited the throne of our Kingdom. Vali was very valiant. At the time he was engaged to marry Tara, daughter of his uncle. Before the banns were published and before the court was out of mourning, Ravana, the monster of Ceylon, invaded our country. His army looked fearful. And he, the most terrible, had ten heads on his one pair of shoulders. The monster presented a gruesome front. Naturally, all the monkeys were so terrorised by the sight of the Rakshasa grotesques that they stayed riveted wherever they happened to be. Of course, the fiends led by Ravana devoured them without mercy. Hundreds of monkeys vanished into their maws. Kishkindha, full of our apes, was deprived of half its inhabitants overnight.

"Eating all kinds of monkeys, and literally enjoying the suffering and wails of the widowed and the orphaned, the Rakshasas made their advance towards the capital. The ghastly tale of our plight reached the ears of King Vali. Like thunder from the lair of the sky, he went forth. In one bound he cleared miles, then fell on the fiend's right.

"Lifting trees as if they were blades of grass he hurled them upon the Rakshasa army. Sugriva, his

younger brother, following his example, smote Ravana's left wing. He picked up hillocks, as a child lifts pebbles, and pounded the enemy with them. Lo, within a few hours, the Rakshasa-hosts were fleeing southward like geese before eagles.

"Having scattered Ravana's right wing, Vali now fell upon the Demon-king himself. You have surely heard that the latter rides Pushpaka Ratha, an aerial chariot drawn by the winged steeds of Paradise. His air chariot made him well-nigh invincible. But not this time! Our King tore the reins and the other ropes that held the chariot to the stallions who fled in the direction of Lanka, like common horses winged with terror. And the chariot bearing Ravana fell to the ground. Behold, on them fell our King Vali. A fierce hand-to-hand combat ensued between the field and the chief of monkeys. While twenty hands rained mighty blows, ten mouths buried their teeth into Vali's body; the latter, roaring and screaming, began to wind his long thick tail around the enemy's throat. This revealed a terrifying sight. Suddenly Ravana stopped biting the King; instead, he opened his ten mouths and kept gasping for breath. Imagine ten mouths large as the sunset groaning and yawning for breath! This was a sight to see and not to describe!

"At last, after opening and shutting his mouth for a hundred times, Ravana managed to convey to Bali: 'You cannot kill me. I am immortal.'

"Vali roared in anger: 'I can at least teach you not to attack my subjects again.'

"He tightened his tail around the Rakshasa's neck more harshly. There was nothing left for the Rakshasa to do but to beg for mercy. With twenty palms folded into a gesture of abject supplication, Ravana begged to be released. Our King who was chivalry incarnate acceded to the demon's pleading.

"Towards sundown, after writing and signing a pledge that he and his fiends would keep away from our Kingdom, Ravana stole away towards Ceylon. Neither he nor a single subject of his has been this way since.

"But this victory had a strange effect on Vali. He wanted to be an immortal like Ravana. He felt that if the conqueror of Ravana could become free of the dominion of death, he would be able to rule Ravana, and also the universe, now held under the lordship of the Rakshasas.

" 'If Ravana is deathless,' he said to himself, 'why not his conqueror, I, Vali? I, too, can compel immortality.'

"Only one course was left for the King to follow. He had to go to the Himalayas to pray to the Creator for immortality. Instantly, he took that path. The throne of our kingdom he handed over to his younger brother, Sugriva, who not only did as he was bidden, but married Tara as well.

"Impatience assailed Vali. He was fretting in the mountains at the long time necessary for prayer and penance before God. He found winning immortality a very dull task. Soon he was anxious to give up praying in order to do something else. Just at that moment, a group from Sugriva's realm—some of the rebellious nobles—went to see him. They told Vali strange tales of misrule, and they filled his mind with falsehood. They informed him that Sugriva was ruining the Kingdom. Vali must return in order to save it."

"What took place, next?" asked Hanuman.

Jambuban responded readily, "Without examining carefully what he had been told, Vali abandoned his spiritual exercises in the Himalaya Mountains and returned home. Without stopping to investigate the exact state of affairs, he accepted the malicious inventions of the nobles as truth and started a revolution. This acted like electricity on all.

"Moreover, his desire to be King again was so great that he marched at the head of the traitors and laid siege to the royal citadel, declaring, 'Sugriva must abdicate in favour of the lawful inheritor of the throne.'

" 'Down with the Tyrant!' shouted the feudal chiefs.

" 'Hail Vali,' proclaimed the citizens in the bazaar.

"No one knew why the people changed their allegiance so quickly. All of them imitated the nobles. No doubt it is the nature of most monkeys to accept gladly the new in the place of the old. To them it meant another amusement. Since monkeys are bored

frequently, they love change. They accept novelty of any sort without examining its meaning deeply. Their treachery to King Sugriva can not be condemned severely, for they did according to their nature which is love of change through fear of boredom.

"The greatest danger to any society, animal or human, lurks in the hearts of its bored people. Boredom goeth before death.

"By the time the King heard the news of the rebellion, it had become too late for an extensive war preparation. His army and the other members of his garrison were loyal. He could easily offer battle. It was I who advised the opposite course: 'There is no reason to indulge in civil war, the most hated species of warfare. It pits brother against brother, cousin against cousin, and sometimes sons against their father.'

"But at the same time, the King felt that his self-esteem demanded that Vali should not take away his throne in a summary manner, for this would be an affront to his own honour.

"The King said aloud, 'Vali must ask for the crown. He should not be permitted to act like a robber. Let him speak out.'

"Without another thought, he went to the gates of the citadel and met Vali face to face. The latter was taken aback by this move. But instead of seeing the beauty of the King's attitude, he saw in it an insult.

"Acting as he felt, he shouted, 'Vacate the throne, or give battle.'

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" 'The throne is not mine to vacate,' announced Sugriva with great dignity. 'It is a trust handed down by our ancestors.'

" 'No, you fool,' shouted Vali. 'It is mine. I permitted you to sit on it for a while. Now begone!'

"It became manifest to Sugriva that Vali wanted to humiliate him. This he could not allow. Suddenly an inspiration seized him.

"He said, 'I will not plunge this nation into a civil conflict.'

" 'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed Vali and his vassals derisively.

"Ignoring the taunting laughter, the King added: 'It is a war between thee and me. I challenge thee into single combat. If I am defeated, I shall go hence. Otherwise, I stay.'

"Vali fell on his brother instantly. It was most unfair. So greedy was he to be King that he could not afford to be generous. He smote the King again and again, hoping to disable him at once. To be struck suddenly and treacherously by anyone, let alone one's own brother, was outside the rule of chivalry. Sugriva felt heartsick. He did not care to wage war against one, so inferior in mind and spirit. Besides, Vali's first blow had dislocated his right arm.

"Mechanically obeying his sense of honour, he kept up the combat in spite of his handicap. He dealt some shrewd blows at Vali's head, almost stunning him more than once. Like two bears, large as thunderclouds, they roared and scratched and bit one another.

VAALI
NATU.ORG

Hour after hour, they went on. Day passed into night, yet they fought.

"It was about midnight, when Sugriva was beaten at last. In order to hide his shame, he slunk into the jungles. I was the only one who followed him to his exile.

"On the morrow Sugriva was almost dead. Fortunately, we were found by no less a being than the Wind-god who was on his way to Ceylon. He . . ."

"Father!" exclaimed Hanuman. "He never spoke of it."

But Jambuban went on: "The sight of Sugriva bleeding slowly to death surprised him an instant. But, his godly wisdom whispered into my hearing, 'This is for the best.'

"Now lifting the King in his arms, he soared to the dawn-kindled ramparts of the east. There he addressed the God of Day, 'O Surya, thy own son is dying. Heal him. He has been stricken in a foul manner.'

"At the sight of his son, anger filled the eyes of Surya. It seemed the welkin would turn into cinders.

" 'Who has shamed my name?' he demanded of Pavana. He cursed thus: 'He who has injured my child, shall die of a foul blow.'

" 'Desist, Surya; withdraw thy fearful anger, I beg you,' expostulated Storm.

" 'I shall do so, to please thee, Pavana. Please explain.'

"The Lord of Light now grew calm again, bathing

the world with his ordinary radiance. By the time Pavana had told him what he knew, and the need for healing Sugriva being urgent, the gods prepared to perform the necessary magic on him.

"The sun chanted the final formula: 'Na tasya roga na jara na mrityu praptasya yogagni mayam shariram.'

"Lo, from the core of Surya leaped a shaft of fire, whiter than the lightning, softer than the softest music. and entered the monkey's body. It seemed less than an instant when the miracle happened. Sugriva was healed! He sat up on the mammoth lap of Storm and gazed into his father's terrifying eyes. These, instead of turning him into ashes, rained pure rays of indescribable glory.

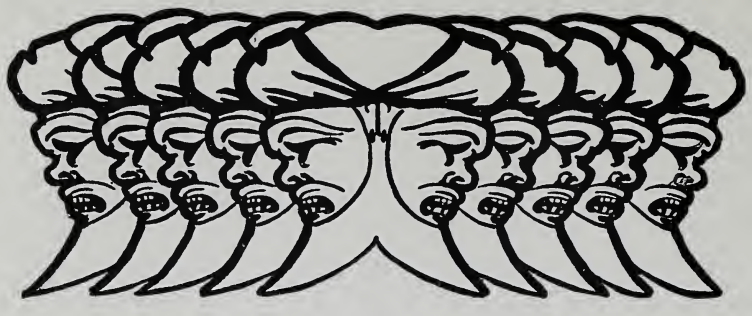
"In that communion, father and son stayed some time. Then slowly, Surya said, 'Forget last night. He who will avenge you is a man named Rama. My divine eyes foresee his coming. He is on his way. Fail not to recognise that god in human form, when you see him. Into your eyes I have placed that divya jyoti, fire of divinity, which will reveal his identity when you and he shall meet. Farewell, my son. Permit me to go to my duties.'

"After Surya had flown to the higher sky, Pavana, carrying Sugriva on his back, came down to me; then told us to go to the court of King Hanuman. After the god had swept on to the south, Sugriva and I slowly wended our way to your Kingdom."

Hanuman now confided to Jambuban, "That my father had encountered you and King Sugriva, I never learned from his lips."

Jambuban explained: "He is a god like Surya, or like my father, the Big Bear. None of the divine beings, no matter what their functions and relationships, speak through reason, nor do they observe the sequence of time. They speak of whatever happens to strike their fancy. And they seem to do as they please."

Hanuman agreed; "My father," he went on to say, "fits your description admirably. He never gives you the cause, the effect of which he has been telling. Sequence and reasoning do not bother him. He tells the end of a story without mentioning its beginning and middle. It must be a great convenience to be a god."



CHAPTER XV

LAST MEETING OF PAVANA AND HANUMAN

JAMBUBAN'S tale lasted till dawn. Instead of starting homeward, Hanuman decided to tarry another day on the bank of the Cavery where innumerable birds poured out their song, while many others flashed by in their scarlet, blue, purple, and saffron glory. Here and there flocks of golden pheasants and dancing peacocks passed like royal dancers. Stags challenged one another, smiting the echoes like drums. And eagles screeched in the sky, saluting the risen sun.

Every passing moment in this valley of enchantment cemented the friendship between Hanuman and Jambuban into a deep bond of loyalty. About the middle of the day, when almost all the animals had hidden themselves from the sun, and the jungle had put its head under its sheet of stillness, Hanuman heard the unmistakable sound—of lute-strings. It came from afar.

"Father," he exclaimed.

"Where?" asked the bear-headed ape who had been sleeping.

"I hear the song of his coming," Hanuman explained. "Come, let us rise to the sky to meet him."

Without waiting for his friend, Pavana's son sprang, shouldering the sapphire sky. He could see coming towards him his sire's radiant wings and burning feet. Like a hawk to its home, the lad flew to his father's side. After greeting each other, they stood still in the upper air. From there Hanuman could see the tumult of the wind in the trees below, in the tousled bed of the stream, and in the mad dance of gold and ruby clouds near by. Roused by Pavana's coming, the pheasants screamed, peacocks spread their fans to dance, and bees hummed as they stung the air with their flight.

"I bring you grave news, my son," the Storm-god said in a casual manner.

"Jambuban is with me, Father," answered Hanuman. "He is rising from the earth."

It was true. That indolent bear-monkey was slowly coming towards them, leaping from tree to tree with great care. The very sight of him made Pavana laugh. His laughter struck the gong of heaven like a hammer, vibrating as if with pleasure.

Impatient, as all gods are, Pavana swooped down like an eagle; then lifted the bear-headed ape with his hands, saying: "You have eaten too much of good fruits. You cannot fly at all. I shall carry you where

Sugriva is. It is an important errand on which I have come."

This supplied Jambuban with the only opportunity of his existence to sense the character of Hanuman's flight. The latter's swiftness could be compared with nothing. Despite his burden, Pavana flew nearly as fast. Forests, valleys, hills and cities spun and vanished under them like wisps of fog in a storm. Even the sun was ultimately outraced, as they skirted Kishkindha and went northwest.

About the middle of the afternoon, they reached Hanuman's capital.

It was after their evening meal that Pavana spoke to Anjana, Hanuman, Jambuban and Sugriva of his weighty message. They were seated on the palace roof under the stars. The night was fragrant with the odours of jasmine, hyacinth, almond blossoms and champak.

In a voice, deep as a bull's, the god spoke: "Now I shall speak of matters seen by my prophetic sense. O Sugriva, be convinced of what I tell. Time is fast approaching, when your brother, Vali, will be destroyed by the hand of one who is God in human form. He is Rama, a prince. This man is coming towards you. He is considered an incarnation of the Supreme Being by all, save Ravana and his Rakshasa hordes. It is fortunate that they should think so. For this thought makes them careless of their own safety. In Lanka I

see its evidence everywhere. Truth to tell, they do not seem to know of Rama and his wife."

"What is Rama, and why is he coming hither?" questioned Sugriva.

Pavana answered, "Like yourself, O Sugriva, he is a King without a crown.

"His exile from his kingdom, however, is voluntary. In order to please his jealous and power-greedy stepmother, Rama handed his rightful throne over to her son, his stepbrother. Though reluctant, the stepbrother, Bharata, had to obey his elder. Besides, he was compelled to please his own mother. But he is so devoted to Rama that he rules the kingdom of Ayodhya, that is its name, as Rama's agent."

"Ayodhya, Ayodhya, I have heard of it," exclaimed Sugriva.

Jambuban amplified what he knew: "It was ruled by Dasaratha who had three wives. The son of the eldest, I heard, was called Rama, and the son of the third was called Bharata. Is the old King dead?"

Pavana answered, "Indeed, Dasaratha is dead. Rama, the rightful inheritor, handed the throne over to his stepmother, Kaikayi, and went forth into the forests, there to dwell fourteen years. Unfortunately for him, but fortunately for the world, he is accompanied by his third half brother, Lakshmana, and his own wife, Sita."

"Sita!" exclaimed Hanuman.

"I understand your wonder," said Pavana to his son. "She is the daughter of King Janaka of Mithala, whose capital is Benares. You and I once flew over that greatest of all cities."

Here the Wind-god turned to the other monkeys, and said: "This Sita is of ravishing exterior. Her face is gracious like a lotus flower at the first flush of dawn. Her body is more perfect than is known to the strictest canons of art. Music has made its nest in her throat, and the Goddess Purity dwells in her heart. Her," Pavana emphasised his anger, "the quintessence of womanly beauty, Ravana, the abominable, has set out to steal from Rama."

"No!" exclaimed his three animal listeners in indignation.

"Yes, in truth," resumed Pavana. "Fortunately for the gods, if Ravana faces Rama in battle, he will be slain. Then we, the captive gods, shall be free."

Here the cunning Jambuban gave a new turn to the god's story: "Suppose he steals Rama's wife, when Rama is away from home."

Pavana rejoined with calm: "My prophetic eye has not cared to think, or, rather, has not cared to look into that alternative."

Jambuban went further into the matter: "Because I did not cunningly contrive alternative plans and rival intrigues, behold me now and my King Sugriva—discrowned. You see that my King is as nothing, and I, a councillor of state, have no one to command. O sire

of noble Hanuman, permit me to say that misfortune has taught me to think of alternative events. What would happen if Ravana stole Sita and made good his escape, ere Rama heard of it?"

In a few moments Pavana answered, "In that case you three will have to assist Rama in recovering Sita from Ravana's clutches, for Rama, alone, can kill Ravana. It will take you some time to bring them face to face. It shall be your task. I leave the matter to the three of you. Remember this also, no one knows where Ravana will eventually hide Sita. In order to hold her securely, he may choose a place either in Lanka or in the Himalayas. He is of serpent-surpassing cunning."

The god's prophetic eyes had seen as present what was yet to come. It was after his present vacation had ended and Pavana had returned to his servitude in Lanka that the theft of Sita took place. But before going south, Pavana asked Anjana's permission to take Hanuman with him for a few days. This was readily granted.

One daybreak, ere the quickfooted dawn had run over the cloud-banks of the east, Pavana spread his sun-coloured wings, and rose to the highest sky, followed by Hanuman. Wherever they looked, the intangible solitude of the ether greeted their eyes.

Feeling that he could not be overheard by anyone, the god said, "There below us are the eastern hills. If you have to go towards Lanka some day, follow these

ridges, for they hide many lakes of pure water, secret cisterns, hewn in the hills by the gods. Bend west at Mahadura into another lake country. Then go south again over the Malabar hills, through Kerala to the coast, leading to the southernmost point of India."

Having indicated the path orally, the Wind-god led his offspring: "Let us go east where you shall see the ocean. Then, if you follow its shoreland southward, you shall find Malabar whence it is easy to leap to Lanka."

It did not take them long to reach the lagoons of Kerala. Passing, they espied the sea spread like a sapphire banner, bediamonded with foam.

The sight perplexed Hanuman. He asked: "How can it be true? Is it not a part of the sky?"

"No," his father enlightened him, "the sky does not moan and murmur all the time. Listen carefully." Now he recited poetry: "It is a wilderness of waters—a many-voiced silence."

Soon the god led his son downwards and landed on the broad sandy beach that a few moments ago had seemed no broader than a riband of gold.

Now Hanuman experienced a strange terror. All land animals feel this, when they come suddenly upon the ocean. The sea's menacing white teeth, the writhing of its body, and the noises it made nearly stunned him with a sense of the sublime..

"Harken unto me, my son," his father discoursed to

him. "I part from you now, for good. My last lesson you received just now. Follow the path shown you, when need arises to bring Rama face to face with Ravana. Promise me that you will live and strive to accomplish this. Without it we, the gods, shall not be free. Promise!"

Without any bragging of any kind, Hanuman promised. That day father and son parted, not to see each other for many years to come.

As soon as the god was out of sight in the southern sky, Hanuman, too, leaped to the air in the opposite direction. He went very fast, faster than usual. His heart was heavy. It needed company. Just when he had covered half the distance on his homeward path, he saw a strange sight.

From the north, at first came the tumult of fierce wing-beasts. They made a noise unknown to his ears. Swiftly, he shot down and hid behind a mountain peak. Ere he had concealed himself completely, he saw winged horses flying towards him. From their hoofs the sunlight glinted in opal; their wings struck the blue void, churning up storm; from their flanks poured forth rainlike lava. Lo, after them came the chariot to which they were tethered with iridescent thongs.

In the chariot he saw a monstrous shape—a man with ten heads on one pair of shoulders. Though he saw the vision swiftly, his intuition told him that it was Ravana.

The fleeting sight of the Rakshasa tallied with the descriptions of him, given so often by Pavana.

His recent experience puzzled his intellect. He kept repeating to himself: "My father said that he had gone to steal Rama's wife, Sita. But she was not with him. Did he fail to steal her?"

Then, seeing that his mind was not able to answer his own questions, he decided to speak to Sugriva and the cunning Jambuban.

That evening after their dinner, Hanuman told the other two of his vision of Ravana.

Then he asked: "Why was not Sita with him?"

After pondering a while, Jambuban solved the puzzle: "Ravana made this journey to get a glimpse of Sita. Now, if her beauty kindles his desire, he will devise a plan by which he is certain to trap her. I warrant you, this visit of the fiend's was in the nature of verifying the stories of Sita's beauty that his spies had put into his twenty long ears."

Jambuban was accurate in his surmise. This time Ravana had gone only to take a look at the great beauty praised by his emissaries. In order to do this, he hid himself behind a tree near Dandaka forest where Rama had made his home. Not one of them, Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita had observed him stealing through the jungle. He obtained an excellent view of them.

By the time he had returned to his capital, the pic-

tures of Sita conjured in his mind stung his soul persistently.

"Possess, possess, now that you have seen that wondrous beauty," Ravana said to himself without ceasing, day after day.

End of Part I

THE MASTER MONKEY

Part Two

CHAPTER I

JOURNEY TO KISHKINDHA

"NO TIME is to be lost." It was Anjana speaking on the roof of the royal palace. Before her were seated Jambuban, Sugriva and Hanuman.

"I agree, O royal lady," answered Sugriva. "But how can I go back to Kishkindha except as its conquering overlord?"

"You can go in disguise," suggested Pavana's wife.

Thinking that this might prove too fantastic a plan, she gave many sound reasons: "If you, your apes and other monkeys are to be with Hanuman in your effort to free the gods from slavery in Ceylon, first of all he must see them. He should be taken there and shown the number and quality of your people now living under the usurper, Vali."

Jambuban added his reasons to the above: "I agree with the royal mother of Hanuman. We should spy on the subjects of Vali in order to make sure that when the time is ripe, we shall be able to overthrow

the usurper. Besides, Hanuman, whose destiny is allied with yours, must be made to know the monkeys with whose help we shall go to rescue the gods from Lanka. Hanuman, alone, has been taught by his father how to traverse India from the Himalayas to the southernmost point. He must teach and lead your monkeys in their efforts."

Now Hanuman spoke: "Disguise yourself, if for no other reason than to determine whether you can act a part or not. From time immemorial, kings of this earth have gone about in disguise among their subjects, just for fun. Why should you not act as a clown in a play?"

"A clown in a play!" exclaimed Sugriva with jest. "Good!"

The idea of playing the fool amused him.

The next day after ordering his subjects to live under Anjana's rule until his return, their King and his two friends set out for Kishkindha. They were disguised as actors. Hanuman, who assumed the appearance of a clown, had done the trick by a subtle stroke of genius. His character, he was certain, would rouse universal laughter.

When they looked at him, Jambuban and Sugriva burst into uproarious laughter. They bent, they twisted, they rolled on the ground, driven by mirth. Their noisy appreciation convinced our hero that his disguise had achieved perfection. What part was he playing? His latest apparition—what was it? How did

he manage it? They asked in order to laugh some more.

It was achieved by a very simple device. Hanuman turned himself into a man, and to the apes, there is nothing funnier than Man. To them, Man is but a baboon who wobbles on his hind legs, and who is deprived of the noble elegance of a tail.

At last, when they had laughed their fill, Sugriva who was walking alongside of "the man" asked: "Man is the silliest sight on God's earth; what makes him so proud?"

Hanuman, who had knowledge of man's power, explained: "My father told you that man can kill Ravana, and even the gods cannot accomplish this."

Jambuban, who was straggling behind the other two, growled and asked: "Can he think?"

His question made Hanuman laugh. "Can he think?" He repeated the three words over and over, and portrayed their meaning with antics.

After clowning for a while, he continued: "Can he think? Friend Jambuban, for a monkey you think a lot, no doubt. But your mind compares with man's as the owl's eyes with sun at noon."

Then they had reached Kishkindha whose northern edge was occupied by the brown "leaf-monkey" whose cheeks were covered with beards like weeping willows and on whose head rose a mass of dark hair, exactly in the shape of a tall crown. These quadrupeds, no bigger than a sheep dog, had tails twice the size of

their body. When they beheld Hanuman, the whole tribe burst into laughter loud enough to still the thunder; male, female and cubs followed the man and his friends like snakes lured by a charmer's flute. Their frequent and universal remark was: "Look at that—the caricature of a monkey. It is called Man."

Passing out of their feudal territory, Hanuman and his friends reached the demesne of the clan of lion-tailed monkeys whose faces were framed in patriarchal beards, but whose heads had hardly any hair at all. Their black bodies contrasted ridiculously with their white beards and tails.

When his eyes fell on them, Hanuman burst out laughing. They greeted him in the same manner, amused at the way he stood on his hind legs. As soon as they learned that he was man, they followed him all the way to the homeland of the next clan, that of the "purple-faced" baboons.

They laughed so at the sight of Hanuman that their faces turned scarlet. They followed him to the end of their territory, exactly in the same manner as that of the other tribes.

It took Hanuman a whole week to visit all the clans of monkeys. Whether they were crab-eating langurs, pigtailed baboons, or well-bred, aristocratic apes—not a single one of them could escape from a guffaw, when their eyes met Hanuman's for the first time. This was all to the good. For, while Hanuman disarmed their suspicions by making them laugh, Sugriva and Jambu-

ban freely mingled with the denizens of Kishkindha and learned of the exact state of the popular mind. They gathered from reliable sources the information that Vali was ruling the kingdom in the wanton manner of an execrable autocrat. He had not only forced Sugriva's wife, Tara, to marry him, but had forcibly married the eldest daughters of the four noblest families of Kishkindha. Though this was according to the custom of the country, yet everybody seemed to hate Vali for his conduct.

It was the day just before their return journey, when the King heard of the presence of a man in his capital. He instantly sent for Hanuman.

Since no one dared disobey the royal fiat, Hanuman went—alone—to the royal palace fashioned out of marble and sandalwood. Vali, who had seen man in northern India, was not surprised. But his wives were. They laughed heartily at "the caricature of an ape," as they styled him.

"What a sight!" they exclaimed, and then laughed some more.

Seeing that his women would not cease laughing, the King sent them away. Now Hanuman stood face to face with the greatest of monkeys. A thrill of pleasure coursed through his body. Vali was tawny as a lion, tall as a coco-palm, and sinewy as a tiger. His eyes poured streams of light, and his speech sounded like the clangour of drums and steel.

The "man" bowed before the King's sumptuous majesty.

Since he was not permitted to leave, Hanuman spent four days as guest of Vali. He played the part of a human clown every hour in order to amuse the King, the royal ladies and the aristocracy. Every soul that met him loved "the man." Being talkative, the monkeys poured their deepest admiration into his hearing. Their only regret they stated thus: "If only he had a long tail, he would be superb."

At last came the day when Hanuman took his leave of the King. After embracing him, Vali said: "Do you know you are not a man?"

Those words pierced "the man" like a javelin, nearly felling him to the ground. Hanuman wondered if the King had pierced his disguise.

Vali went on, "You see, man eats cooked food. You did not cook a single meal here. What is more, you ate our food with the relish of a cow. I do not know why you put on this disguise. But promise one thing, that you observe the sacred rules of hospitality. You who have eaten with me at my table will do me no injury with your own hands. He who eats my salt can not be my sworn enemy."

"O King," exclaimed Hanuman, "I understand. These hands are pledged. They shall not be raised to hurt you. Farewell!"

Without another word, the embarrassed Hanuman

left the court of Kishkindha. Fearing that Vali's secret agents might follow him where Jambuban and Sugriva were hiding, he took a straight course to the north, travelling alone in his disguise. In time, when he reached home, he found his two friends there awaiting him. They too had escaped scathless from the Kingdom of Vali.

CHAPTER II

RAVANA'S EVIL DESIGN

IN THE meantime, way to the south the ten-necked demon fretted in Lanka, for he was smitten with Sita's beauty. Sometimes, as one possessed, he roamed the streets of his capital. He issued forth from his own house without any ceremony and walked on the marble sidewalks of Lanka. He wandered through the city parks where Rakshasas played strange musical instruments. Fountains sobbed, as wonder-clad demons of all sizes and shapes took the air. But Ravana saw and

heard nothing. He was stricken and held by the image of Sita. The gold terraces of many palace gardens, their windows of ivory lattice-work and the singing of innumerable celestial birds, could not dispel the gloom that had descended on him. Art and philosophy could not wean him from his fatal desire for Sita.

Unable to bear it any longer, he said to himself, "I have a right to Sita whose image tortures my mind so keenly. The only way to ease my pain lies in robbing Rama of his wife."

No sooner had he conceived that evil thought than he acted upon it. He took with him a demon magician, named Maricha, and set forth in the aerial chariot. Its winged horses swiftly carried him toward the forest of Dandaka, and as they went, the Rakshasa Raja talked with Maricha of his plan of stealing Rama's wife. They discussed all ways and plans. At last, when they were reaching their journey's end, Ravana said with finality, "Do as I bid thee. After we tether my horses to the base of Nilgiri (Blue Mountains), transform thyself into a spotless golden deer. Let thine antlers be of the same precious ore. Having taken that form by enchantment, wander near the cottage of Rama. I am sure when Sita sees thee she will covet thee. Then, if she sends her husband or Lakshmana to chase thee, run away exactly as I have commanded. Follow each instruction as thou wouldst follow thine own thought, for if thou fail thou shalt be at once destroyed."

Day after day and in the form of a golden stag,

Maricha romped about Rama's cottage. No eyes ever saw such a beast! He was gold from hoof to the tip of his antlers. Even in the heat of the day, he took no rest, appearing in the green jungle at noon like gold coming out of a furnace of emerald. And, at sunset, the blazing light shining on him seemed to wash him with purple waters.

Who could resist such a ravishing creature? So one afternoon, as she saw him leap into sight from behind a Sal tree, Sita said to Rama, "Catch that deer for me, my Lord. Give it to me for a playmate."

Rama answered, "It is impossible that it is real. No such golden deer, Sita, have men ever seen before. Covet not this beast. I feel a strange foreboding that this creature, if we are not wary, may do us harm."

But when calamity is near, even the keenest minds are deceived. Janaka's daughter begged, "O Rama, go forth to hunt it. Bring to me that unreal creature, dead or alive. Living, it will be my pet, dead, its skin will be my prize."

Seeing that she would turn a deaf ear to his pleading, Rama made ready for the hunt. Before setting out, he enjoined Lakshmana, "Keep close watch on Janaka's spoilt darling. O brother, leave not her side until I return. Promise that you will guard her."

Lakshmana vowed, "I will take care of Sita even to the least gasp of my last breath."

After embracing Sita and his devoted brother, Rama

ran in pursuit of the deer. The Rakshasa, seeing him in hot pursuit, acted as he had been instructed by his chief. He led Rama far away from the cottage; round and round, deep in jungle depths, he sped, till the man pursuing lost all sense of direction. Rama knew now that he was lost in the woods. If he allowed the golden apparition to lead him further, he would never find his way back. He decided to abandon the hope of trapping Maricha alive. He must either slay him at once or give up the chase in order to return to Sita. To save time, he took good aim and fired the arrow "Edge of God." It spun through the air, pierced Maricha and pinned him to the floor of the woods. Instantly, he resumed his Rakshasa shape and wailed as he had been instructed in the voice of Rama himself, "Come, Lakshmana. Come to my rescue, the deer is goring me. Come to me, O Lakshmana."

When Rama heard his own voice issuing out of the fiend's mouth, he sought to silence him with another arrow, but ere "Sabdabhedi"—the sound-piercer—left his bowstring, Maricha had repeated his cry and shaken all the echoes with it: "Come to me, Lakshmana, come."

Fearing that Lakshmana would obey that deceitful call for help, and leave the side of Sita, Rama hastened homeward. But the jungle gloom made him feel his way like a blind man. After slaying many elephants and tigers, he found a path leading through the intricate

thickets out of the woods. Hardly had he gone a hundred paces on it, when he met Lakshmana coming towards him, like a stallion unfettered. Beholding him running at such a pace, Rama exclaimed, "The air is full of dire forebodings. O Sita, what sinister forces hast thou unloosed by thy desire for the golden beast."

Lakshmana cried, "O Rama, thou art safe! But why then didst thou cry out so loudly for help?"

"Speak at length, dear Lakshmana," answered Rama, "while we hasten back to Sita, the crown of womanhood."

"When she heard your cry for help repeated a hundred times by the echoes, she urged me to run to your rescue, but I answered that my duty lay at her side. Enraged by my repeating these words, she cried, 'Thou flyest not to save Rama because thou dost covet me. If he dies, thou hopest to possess me.' Thrice she hurled at me that insult which dug into me like a sharp goad. Swiftly I put a spell around the cottage and ran in the direction of thy cry."

"Thou hast acted to the best of thine insight," said Rama. "But, O Sita," he thought, "why didst thou use such words? Into the evil maze of fate, my bride, thou seemest to enter. All is dark and obscure before me." Now turning to Lakshmana, Rama exclaimed, "I seem to hold a thread of truth that leads to the purpose for which thou and I have been born. Why do I feel this strange sense of purpose entering into my life? Why am I filled also with the utmost misgiving?"

Without another word, the princes hastened on as best they could. Each was silent like a tiger stalking a prey. Lakshmana was still chafing under the insults poured on him by Sita, and he was resentful toward her. And Rama suspected that some evil had come upon her and was stricken with anxiety for her safety. In the younger brother, the serpent of pride raised its head, while in the heart of the elder, pity battled with fear.

At last, when they reached the cottage an hour before sundown, they found no Sita there. They shouted, clapped hands and made signs of other kinds, but fate vouchsafed no response, though their hearts were breaking. On the river-bank there was no sign of her. Near the lotus pool there was no sign of her. In the near-by Kadamba bower, no mark of her coming!

"Where, where art thou, Janaka's daughter?" wailed the two youths.

"Nowhere, nowhere, nowhere," the trees and the creepers whispered, each time they shed a leaf.

"Is she kidnapped?" Rama asked.

"How could she be?" answered Lakshmana. "I put a spell around our cottage. Nothing could come within thirty feet of it. Unless Sita went beyond it, nobody could penetrate the enchanted circle and put hand on her."

"Sita, speak. Where art thou? Speak, my beloved." To Rama's continued cry, only silence answered; even

the echoes were weary with grief, and night, unable to bear their cries and hopeless searchings, put forth the moon. In thick clusters of stars she hung the sky. With silver softness the world was surrounded. At last, worn and exhausted, the two brothers fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

SEARCH FOR SITA

BUT Rama, almost insane with grief, slept most restlessly. He moaned and sobbed, as he lay on the floor of the hut. At each rustle of the wind, he jumped to his feet. He listened intently, saying, "There she returns. Listen, brother, listen." Soon his mind became so engrossed in hearing sounds that the stealthy step of a panther, or a stag's wild dash for life, he construed as Sita's coming. And a buffalo's death-bellow under the tiger's deafening roar he thought was Sita calling for help. Lakshmana had to hold him by force in order to prevent him from rush-

ing into certain death. All night long the elder prince acted like one out of his mind, and this tortured the younger brother's patience.

At last the day broke and both of them set out to search for Sita. The blow of calamity that had stunned their minds suddenly made them keen-eyed like eagles, and alert, as the very self of cunning. Beyond Lakshmana's ring of charm, they noticed there were marks of violence on the ground, as if someone had dragged Sita by her hair. They followed the marks wherever they led. After a few feet there were no signs on the earth, save the print of a giant's foot. That puzzled the princes exceedingly.

"How can a man's foot suddenly change into that of a giant?" asked Lakshmana.

"Follow the footprints, brother," begged Rama, "no matter where."

Even so, they ended soon at a place where were marks of horses' hoofs and the track of a chariot. Suddenly, the traces of both hoofs and wheels disappeared. Only a sinister stillness lay about that spot. Lo, there was not the sigh of the wind, not the lifting of a twig, to point the way whither the horses and chariot had taken Rama's beloved.

A renewed spell of madness seized Rama's brain. He went to the Tamala tree, and cried, "Knowest thou where Sita has gone? Speak, O king of trees!" The silence of the tree enraged him. "Thou speakest not, soul

of insolence that thou art, and for this, at death, thou shalt enter hell."

Then he went to the Champaka that was pouring down blossoms and perfume to intoxicate the heart: "O fountain of sweetness, tell me where hides Sita to test my love? In this game of hide-and-seek, I am beaten; now point out to me my love's hiding place."

But, alas, that tree, too, made no response.

Incensed at its hardness, Rama said, "A curse on all trees. Now I shall question the vines and creepers of this forest. O ye that wind your charms, tell me the secret of Sita. Why has she left me in this state? Speak, trumpet your tale, mistress of the forest." Vine after vine he addressed; but none gave him any answer, for which he cursed them, too, again and again.

In his wandering Rama came upon a cleared spot on whose green grass lay Sita's bracelet. The sight of that ornament restored sanity to his brain: "Behold, Sita's ornament!! Where is she? . . . Thus far we have traced her, brother Lakshmana, let us push on farther yet."

Hardly had they gone a thousand paces, when they heard the piercing call of a being in great distress. They hurried through bushes whose thorns were large as spears. Now and then cutting down creepers thick as an elephant's waist, they pushed in the direction of that voice. At last, after leaping over innumerable crags and rivulets, and bleeding and bruised they stumbled upon a giant bird wallowing in a pool of blood. It was re-

peating "Mara-Rama, Rama-Mara," in a heart-rending wail.

"Why dost thou take my name?" demanded Rama.

"I am Jatayu, thy father's friend," answered the bird.

"A friend of my father's shall have the protection of my arm and the love of my heart." Rama said further, "What brought thee to such a pass? Why dost thou suffer so?"

"I sought to save Sita from the demon, Ravana."

"Sita, didst thou say?" Rama seemed to wail. "Speak, thou overlord of the sky."

"Sita was carried off on his aerial chariot by the Rakshasa King Ravana. She called for help. I, who knew thy father in our youth, have never denied succour to any woman in trouble. So I came down, wings outspread like naked swords, and beak grim as the jaws of death. In an instant, I smote Ravana so hard that his bow fell from his hand. And as I smote him, I heard thy wife say, 'Tell Rama Ravana has taken me. Fly to him, O compeller of speed.' Then Ravana shouted, 'I am Ravana the King of Lanka; if there is skill in me, thou shalt fall here dead as a viper killed. Thou shalt never fly to Rama to tell him anything.' Then he drew his sword. I flew far above him. His two winged beasts caught up with me. I wheeled away, afar. But his horses followed. Again, they caught up to me, as an eagle catches a dove. I swooped down under them like a fox between a tiger's feet, but those horses turned about, as I was vaulting up and away. Now

suddenly Ravana's sword cut my wing. Still I fought with my talons. With my beak I caught from Sita this pearl necklace, which she gave me for thee. Now, Rama, go southwards, reach the Indian Ocean, cross it and rescue thy bride from Lanka's fiends. Take this pearl necklace as an earnest of the truth that I am telling thee."

Then kissing Rama's feet, as a sacramental act, the wounded vulture breathed his last. Now his spirit rose from his body in a straight line to the abode of the gods. He who dies fighting for the weak, defeated or victorious, goes to Heaven, be he bird, man, or beast.

The Ratnamala, the pearl garland from Sita's neck, gave the princes certainty. But with certainty came a desperate sense of haste. They were tortured by their fancies. They imagined many horrors that Sita might be enduring, while the task of cremating Jatayu's body engaged their hands and minds for a while. It delayed them, since the funeral had to be done properly. Now in order to do it with every just rite, the princes banished all thoughts of Sita from their minds and concentrated themselves upon the prayers, hymns and right thoughts, without which no good accrues to the soul of the dead. This change of thought, though very brief, refreshed the two princes. They felt completely relieved in mind and body, when they resumed their search after Sita.

CHAPTER IV

THE MONKEYS OF KISHKINDHA

ACTING according to the late Jatayu's advice, the royal youths pushed southwards. But wherever they went, they could find no further trace of Sita. No more ornaments or other tokens had she left behind anywhere. Rama made a superhuman effort to control his grief, for he could not afford to indulge it, now that he knew of Sita's fate. He must work and not grieve.

After scaling the Vindhya mountains they reached Hanuman's realm at the border of Kishkindha. Like spears of sapphire rose its hills, the flanks of which were drenched with rainbows, while around them clamoured

and danced thousand-throated cataracts. Behind them set the sun, a desolation of amber, purple and topaz. Against the sunset sky, and leaping from peak to peak like a tawny eagle, an enormous monkey came down towards the two princes. Seeing that near-man approach them, they held themselves ready to hurl an arrow or offer friendliness, depending on the tree-dweller's own intention. Fortunately, it was a noble one. He had come to them as a helper.

"I am Hanuman, Pavananandan," said he, "son of the Wind-god. I caught this azure veil flung by a woman from an aerial chariot. She screamed out a prayer, 'I beg you to show it to the two royal youths.' Since your bearing indicates to my monkey's eyes your lineage, I present you with the veil."

"Sita's scarf," exclaimed the two brothers in one voice. Rama taking it tenderly from the monkey thanked the latter. With tears in his eyes, he said, "It is to thee I owe a mountain-heavy debt of gratitude. For days we have wandered, looking for some sign of my wife. A Rakshasa named Ravana has stolen her and flown away on an aerial chariot."

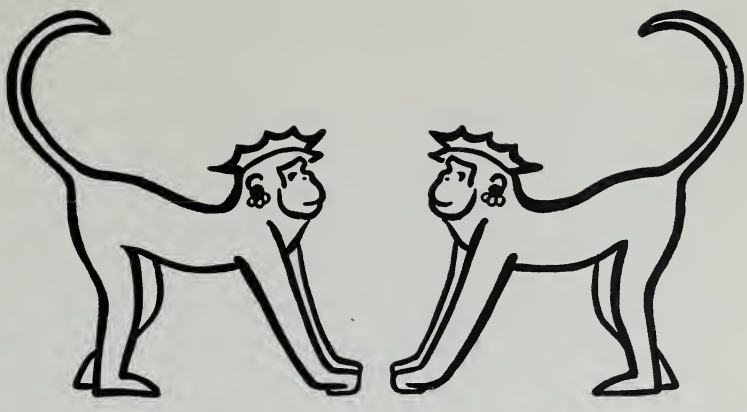
"Now I understand why she screamed. If we had only known, we could have leaped up and stopped that chariot in mid-air and carried out an act of rescue worthy of our mettle," announced Hanuman.

"Who are you? What do ye here? Tell us of your errand," asked Lakshmana.

"I am Hanuman, the chief of the monkeys of this

little kingdom. Besides myself, there are two apes, Sugriva, known as the son of the Sun-god, and Jambuban, the master of wisdom and all learning. Sugriva is the exiled King of Kishkindha. Though robbed of his dominion by his brother, King Sugriva has not lost his sense of hospitality and his excellent elegance. With me he asks you to accept hospitality here."

Lakshmana accepted the monkey king's offer. With courtesy and reserve, Hanuman led them to Anjana's presence, ere the beacon of day had been blown out by the black silence of night.



CHAPTER V

SUGRIVA TELLS HIS STORY

INSTEAD of one night the princes passed several days in the company of the monkeys for a reason which will soon be disclosed.

Sugriva, or the lovely-throated ape, was graciousness itself. While Jambuban was full of knowledge, he looked droll with his bear's head on a monkey's body. It was he who advised Rama to tarry longer with Sugriva, counselling him thus, "If thou wilt help Sugriva to win back his kingdom from Vali, his brother, he will then help thee to rescue thy queen from Ravana, the king of fiends. Thou knowest not whither he bore her. Thou need must command thousands of searchers to scour the four directions of the earth. Those Sugriva will command, if he reconquers his dominion.

Thou alone hast the skill to aid him. By thy help he will conquer Vali. Then all the monkey warriors of his kingdom who now toil under his brother shall be thine. Troops led by thee will conquer Ravana. In order to rescue Sita, first help Sugriva, our King, to regain his kingdom."

One morning Sugriva, himself, begged Rama, "Thou art a man. In my hour of destitution, thy superior soul and human cunning can help me. With your help I can certainly win back my kingdom of Kishkindha. After ten years of lawful reign, I was robbed of my throne and wife, by my brother, Vali."

Rama was deeply moved at Sugriva's speech.

"Most unrighteous!" exclaimed Lakshmana.

"Thou who art the lion of righteousness will help me to regain my lawful crown?" prayed the monkey monarch.

"We pledge thee our arms and a lifelong friendship," Rama responded.

The three monkeys were thrilled. They announced with gratitude, "Then command us. Our friendship will be your sandals; our devotion, your shield; our life, your lance and our souls, your quiver of arrows. We shall live and die, if need be, to restore to you your lost Sita."

Rama, whose actions always reflected his words, urged Sugriva to give battle to Vali at once. For good comes of timely action, and evil of delaying without

plan. So on the morrow, they set out for Kishkindha, the capital of the kingdom, bearing the same name. Borne on the backs of Sugriva and Hanuman, Rama and Lakshmana travelled a thousand furlongs in an hour. Though it was about nine in the morning, they reached Kishkindha's capital.

They scaled its red stone walls and its mansions of brick and wood. After depositing Rama and Lakshmana at the pleasure garden near the royal chambers, Hanuman withdrew to a place of hiding, while the other two monkeys stood at Vali's door and shouted their challenge to him.

The two men hid behind a vast tamarisk tree and watched the antics of the apes. Seeing the vast bronze door open, Jambuban repeated his challenging shout. Hardly had the echoes caught up the noise when, like an ebony tusker of towering stature, Vali leaped forward. He brushed Jambuban aside, and faced his brother, as a Himalayan peak faces a cloud.

"I am ready, brother Sugriva! I heard thy challenge. I accept thy cry for battle. It is a long time since I had an equal to fight. Come, let me crack thy skull, as a little ape cracks the shell of a walnut."

"Thy head it is that shall crack," retorted Sugriva. "Humiliation shall be thy food from now on. Give battle, fool." He fell upon Vali, as a lion on the horns of a bull.

A wail of sorrow rose from the throats of Vali's many

wives in the interior of his home. Rama and Lakshmana understood by their pitch that the monkey women were afraid their husband would be killed.

In the raging battle, drowning all other clamours by their roars, the two monkeys smote each other with vehemence. Their breath rose as black smoke, they spat out comets of fire; and the sounds of their scratches and bites were a veritable thunderstorm. The tide of battle rose and fell. Now Sugriva stood on Vali, then the usurper on top of Sugriva. Thus they fought again and again, till the palace walls crumbled at the impact of their bodies, and the pleasure garden became a quagmire of sweat and mud. The sun passed the meridian. Still they fought, body bruising body, breath scorching breath: two monkeys become one image of hatred, and they were rolled together like a mammoth python. Then from the rolling mass, rose a gory figure. It was Vali bleeding profusely. He tried to throttle Sugriva who groaned and cried for help from Rama. Like a prayer answered ere it is spoken, his cry brought its reward.

Rama, leaping forth from his hiding place, shouted and hurled his javelin, "Vajradanta"—the tusks of a thunderbolt. It spun through the air quicker than two beats of a heart and felled Vali to the ground. The fallen King groaned and screamed in great pain, "I am slain unfairly."

Now Sugriva rose to his feet and bent over his dying brother, as might a storm-bent tamarisk above a fallen

rock. But soon between him and Vali flew shrieking the grief-stricken Tara, Vali's first and most beloved queen. And when her touch had told her hand and heart what had befallen her lord, she stood erect and faced Rama, her lord's slayer. "Why, why hast thou smitten him without warning? Behold thy weapon entered his back first. Its point has come through his chest. Coward's trick this, and from a man, one who prides himself upon his righteousness and superiority to every monkey. Shame on all men. A curse upon thee; the wounded heart of a woman curses thee."

This curse stung Rama as if it were a mortal arrow: "Avert, O avert thy curse, I beg thee. I shot my arrow to help Sugriva, so that he in return may help me to rescue my lost wife, Sita."

"Too late," sighed Tara, relenting, "the curse spoken by a wounded heart never misses its aim. Thou shalt recover thy queen, but not enjoy her. O pity, O pain!" Then she sat down, took her dead husband's head upon her lap and mourned for him seven days.

Those seven days Rama's heart dwelt in a hornet's nest: "Why did I not give fair warning to Vali? What possessed me to hurl the Vajradanta on his back? O Sita, where art thou? Thou alone canst heal my heart from this terrible poison of remorse; thou alone hast the touch that will heal me of my wretched state."

Lakshmana tried to console him, but his heart was not in his words. He did everything to ease his brother's pain, but his own conscience kept repeating within

him, "Since thou didst attack, without giving fair warning, thou must wash away the sin of thine action with the waters of regret."

He suffered as much as Rama, for he felt himself part of that unkingly act. He was humiliated beyond description that he and Rama had done what neither man nor ape would do. Then he blamed himself thus, "Hadst thou but endured Sita's hard words, hadst thou stayed by her in that hut in Dandaka, in spite of every insult, all this could have been prevented. It is thy wounded pride that should be blamed."

But time tempers all things, even these two brothers' regrets. Besides, Sugriva's coronation, the exacting of solemn promise from all to see Angada, Vali's son, proclaimed heir apparent, and other details of the state occupied Rama and Lakshmana. They hardly had time enough to think of themselves. At his coronation they had Sugriva openly avow that he and his two human friends, in order to undo the wrong they had done Vali, thought it fit that his son Angada should be made the lawful crown prince of Kishkindha. Moreover, Tara, his mother, was persuaded to wed Sugriva and be his queen. This she did later, after years of mourning.

As if the end of all endeavours had come, the day after his coronation Sugriva proclaimed a royal holiday for a month. All the monkeys save Tara, Hanuman and Angada took part in the merrymaking. Hanuman went home to see his mother, while Angada

joined Rama and Lakshmana to spend the time in prayers in a near-by hermitage.

A fortnight later Jambuban, grunting bear-fashion, followed them thither. "The kingdom is perishing because of too much happiness. Everyone is so merry that he knows not what he is merry about. O Rama, at the end of this miserable month of pleasure, let us set out in the quest of Sita. The monkeys will need some hard and cruel piece of work, if they are to be purified from the present revelry. Let me pray and meditate with you, for my soul needs to be purged from the happiness of the past two weeks. Excessive pleasure is not good either for men or for monkeys."

CHAPTER VI

THE MONKEYS GO IN QUEST OF SITA

HANUMAN spent his time in arranging the transfer of his authority over his kingdom to his mother's keeping. That accomplished, he recruited all the able-bodied young males and trained them into a compact little army of fierce fighters. These he took as a present and offered them to Rama on his return to Kishkindha.

"Behold, Rama," he explained, "the flower of our youth. I dedicate them to your service. Together with them, I shall fight to the finish that thief, Ravana of Lanka."

Both Rama and Lakshmana wept with joy, as they gratefully accepted the services of Hanuman and his soldiers. Heartened by Hanuman's generosity, Rama went to the royal palace and held a conference with

Sugriva. He told that monarch to bestir himself: "Do not squander our precious days in making merry, O King of Nearmen."

Sugriva, however, begged: "One more month of fun will do us good."

But the wise Jambuban who had accompanied Rama, objected: "O majesty of Kishkindha, only half a dozen weeks ago, we pledged Rama our life and limbs. I beseech and pray that we send out armies of monkeys in quest of Sita. Thou thyself canst stay at home, because thou art our King, but the other monkeys should not be allowed another month of weakening joy."

Sugriva pondered a while, and then asked the Crown Prince Angada's opinion.

The heir apparent bespoke his mind: "I prefer to lead an expedition, your Majesty; I do not wish to loiter here any longer. I wish to test my muscles and my talent for leadership."

"Sadhu, good," exclaimed all present.

Then Hanuman remarked, "The young prince is right. I will go with him wherever he leads."

Now the King himself spoke, "Friend Rama, and brother Lakshmana, you have performed your part of the bargain. It behooves me to carry out the part that is mine. On the morrow, Angada with the son of the storm deity will go south with ten thousand apes. They will examine every needle-point of ground, and I hope they will return with Sita; but if not with her, at least

with trustworthy news of her. Give Hanuman a ring or some token to show her when he locates your bride."

Armed, therefore, with Rama's ring, the heroic Hanuman with Angada went to the outer forts to gather around themselves ten thousand monkeys. Next, went forth Jambuban with orders to send out an equal number of nearmen to scour the east, west and north, for a trace of Sita.

"For," he pondered, "we can leave nothing to chance. We know not where Ravana hides her."

On the morrow with the rising sun, four expeditions set out in four directions. They leaped into the air shading the earth from the god of light. The whole world seemed plunged into midnight gloom. But fortunately even such clouds pass. With the vanishing of the monkey-clouds, the day-god shone upon forest, streams, and fields. Rama and Lakshmana retraced their steps to their retreat, to spend the coming rainy season in thought and prayer.

Before the rains had begun, all the four armies had reached the parts of the earth to which they had set out. The western expedition arrived at the Arabian sea, the eastward-bound monkeys came to the Bay of Bengal, while the northern expedition stopped only where the Himalaya's harsh white peaks thread their way through the stars. And all three of them failed to find any trace of Sita. But the apes of Angada were favored by a small but encouraging incident.

As they leaped from tree to tree and cleared the

horns and shoulders of the southern hills on a high peak near Ramagiri (Rameswaram), they came upon Jatayu's brother, the vulture Sampati. He sat upon a peacock-coloured mountain and scanned the distance. His eyes were large as the moon at sundown, his plumes golden like the sun at rising, and his beak was forked as the lightning. His black talons gripped the peacock-coloured Giri (peak) as a tiger's jaw bites the neck of a bull.

When he saw the apes come swarming through the sky, like giant locusts, he flung a clanging challenge in their teeth. When they heard that entrail-freezing clangour coming from Sampati, Angada and Hanuman were struck, if not with terror, at least with deep awe.

They shouted in answer, "We seek Sita, Rama's bride."

"Approach, friends," cried the bird.

Lo, monkey after monkey fell around him and did obeisance, as vassals, to their chief. Last of all, landed Angada and Hanuman, giving him the salute of equals.

"Friends," the bird of mammoth shape greeted them, "what news of Rama?"

They filled his ear with tidings that pleased the very marrowbone of his spirit. Then it was the monkeys who asked him questions.

Sampati answered, "Ravana's chariot, red with my brother Jatayu's gore, flew by here some time ago. In it I saw Sita chained. She cried to me for help; she begged me to unchain and free her from the demon's

grip. Then, seeing that I did not rise, and in order to goad me to action, she told me of Jatayu's death at Ravana's hand. Oh, the anguish that seized my spirit! My brother's slayer flew by and I could not avenge that foul crime." The vulture shed tears of bitter suffering.

"Why didst thou not fly up and rend the fiend?" asked Angada indignantly.

"Alas, O youth, knowest thou not that the Sun robbed me of my wings?"

"No, we did not know that," chorused all the apes save one, the God of Storms.

Hanuman said, "I crave thy forgiveness, O Sampati. It is my fault that they know not thy family feud with the Sun-god. I neglected to tell it to them before we set forth. I beg thee to tell us how the jealous Sun robbed thee of thy wings."

"Listen to me, listen, O apes without much wit. Learn from my own lips of our battle with the Sun.

"In the days of the gods, when only heroes walked the earth, there were also four vultures, our parents and two children, Jatayu and Sampati, who roamed and ranged the air.

"As our parents grew old, the desire of life first grew faint in the heart of the father bird, and he consented to die in the height of his flight. He hovered so near the Sun that he almost flew above the god, when on a sudden, he fell, as a stone falls into a deep well. His wings were close against his body, with not even

a feather outspread to retard the fall. Down, down, down, he dropped, and still further down, till the hills were passed, then flocks of small birds, then the green-winged jungles, and he disappeared, like a little black leaf, in the waters of the sea.

"The mother, beholding in horror that mysterious fall, cried shrilly to her two sons and called them to their nest in the Himalayas.

"When they reached their home that lay in one of the snowy arms of the hills, she dried her tears and bade the children lie still. At sunset, the snow-peaks burnt like torches, then all were lost to sight, as the stars flung their silence upon the world.

"One day, soon afterward, Jatayu, my younger brother, flew toward the Sun. Mother cried to me, the elder, to follow her. We flew at a certain distance below, so that what she said to me could not reach the ears of the young Sun-invader above.

" 'Sampati,' said my mother, 'promise me to guard Jatayu after I die—even to the end of thy days. Knowest thou what killed thy father?—it was the Sun. He did not wish anyone to fly higher than he himself. Thy father soared almost above his head, and the envious god at once plunged into him his rays of fire.' . . . Suddenly she broke off crying, 'Lo! There is Jatayu, too close already to the Sun. . . . Come down, Jatayu, come down! Wretched boy.'

"But he listened not; so beating her wings with a last effort, she flew above that heedless young one.

That instant the Sun hurled his fatal arrow of fire. It pierced my mother through the heart. Jatayu saw her fall suddenly, her blood glittering like a stream of ruby against the face of day.

"Jatayu flew after her, but she fell, wings folded against her body, past me who was just below her, past flocks of vultures that began to swoop down after her, past the white hills and the palm trees, down into the yellow and green line where the tawny Ganges throws herself into the arms of her lover, the sea.

"That night in our nest, hemmed in by sorrow, I extracted a promise from Jatayu. I made the younger brother swear that he would never go near the Sun, without giving warning of his intention.

"Guarding and educating Jatayu proved almost an impossible task to me. I kept my promise to our mother and never failed to serve the little brother's every need. Jatayu was a soul of fire and the very self of daring. Hardly had the anniversary of our parents' death passed, when he began to plague me for permission to fly to the Sun. As time went on, his requests became more and more frequent, until at last he said:

" 'Thou art jealous of me. Since thou canst not fly to the Sun thyself, thou wouldst fain prevent me from trying my wings.'

"This proved too much for me. I said. 'Tomorrow, then, we shall scale the Sun, if thou wilt promise me one thing: first, that I may go with thee.'

"The next morning, long before the daybreak, we

jumped off the Gauri-Shankar (Everest), where our nest was, and flew upwards. The hills very soon shimmered beneath us, a floor of white marble. Ere it was daylight, we had scaled the cold precipices of the moon and were mounting the roofs of the high-born stars.

"Now the Sun rose, and seeing us, already so high, he himself began to scale the turquoise spaces, with burning haste and fierce pride. The worlds glowed in gold and ruddy light. It was ordained that, once humbled by another, the Sun would lose his power to kill. The planet, Asta Basu, rolled like a small glass ball below us. Others, large stars, swam below now. Many stars fled, frightened by the fury of the Sun. Still we two rose. By now we passed Brihaspati (Jupiter); we leaped over the Silver Wanderer, the Way of Milk, and now, now . . . Jatayu almost reached the hills of noon where the very Sun himself was used to tarry a moment for rest. I was flying below him.

"The angry god flew so fast that he shortened the morning into the wink of an eye. Upwards and upwards ran the Sun.

"Ere Jatayu alighted on the supreme height, suddenly, I saw an arrow of livid fire piercing the sky. It was close upon Jatayu. Luckily I was the nearest to it. With a shriek of anger and a heart full of dismay, and remembering what my mother had done before, I tumbled and turned, and swifter than the telling, spread out a wing that screened my brother from the blow of the Sun.

"Suddenly, I shook and wheeled and fell with a clanging shriek that smote the heavens like a cracked brass gong struck by a hammer of steel. But because I was not taken unaware, as were my parents, I escaped a mortal blow. I lost the use of my wing. By now, all further danger was past, for the Sun had been beaten. Now he was shorn of his power to kill. So he hastened and set.

"The world glowed in colour, as we two brothers swept down and still further down, until the Himalayas, which once appeared like hives of bees, seemed to poise on space, as a golden falcon on the wrist of Heaven. Far flocks of vultures that once swarmed below like hungry black flies, now flew, crimson-winged, with amber feet and ruby beaks. Further down, further yet, we swooped.

"Soon we passed Gauri-Shankar and its lower peaks. Lo, the forests rose like Titans brandishing their spears at us. Lower yet, lower, till men and cattle, unseen from our heights, now beset us on every side.

"Oh, to have been cast so low! Those who once dwelt on the crest of Himalaya, now sought shelter where the foxes wander and the jackals shriek at night. But we were happy, for we had robbed the Sun of his insolence.

"At last, I fell here on a river bank. At once I plunged my burning body in her cooling stream. Soon the sun-colours faded from the world, the forests

throbbed with silence, while the stars rose and flung blackness abroad.

"Though I did not die, I could never fly again. Jatayu now learned from my lips what had befallen our parents and me, one after the other. At last, the secret of the Sun was out.

"I have lived here for many centuries and watched the heavens and the woods. It was this habit of mine that enabled me to catch sight of Sita, as Ravana drove with her in his chariot to Lanka. Here ends my story, also my life. I have no desire to live any more."

When Sampati had ended his tale, he paused for breath. Hanuman said, "Do we fatigue thee, O ruler of the skies?"

"I feel," answered the sky-winger, "that my end is in sight. Ever since Jatayu's death, life has been slipping from me. Now, if I give thee this information, I shall have served Rama to my last breath. And it is prophesied that he who dies serving Rama, enters Heaven without more ceremony than a sleeper plunging into dreams. Listen carefully, stop the jabbering of the younger apes. Can you not see that I am speaking with my last breath? Beyond yonder peak lies the sea, and beyond the sea is the island of Lanka. Thither flew Ravana's chariot with Sita. After I die, cremate me quickly. Do not waste time on my funeral. Then swiftly leap over that southern hill that burns like a diamond. At its feet, the sea is spread, and beyond it, lies Lanka where dwells the imprisoned Sita."

CHAPTER VII

THE FLIGHT OF HANUMAN

WHEN the apes beheld Rama Giri's shore, they could not believe their eyes. None of them, save Hanuman, had beheld any water, save only the tawny rivers and blue lakes.

Now, behold, suddenly before them, rose the emerald ramparts of the sea, battlement upon battlement, foam-crested parapets, distances flagged with opal spindrift. As the green waves hammered the ivory beach, the monkeys trembled like children in fright. Awe and terror pierced them, while they descended to the sand and scanned the simple line of the horizon against which the ocean charged. None spoke for a whole day in the presence of that majesty.

After they had become used to the ocean, the apes held a council of war on the edge of Rama Giri. Each

one quailed before the thought of crossing it. All monkeys fear the water, because the Indian Ocean is full of sharks, makars, and dragons who find monkeys a most toothsome diet. Fear entered every soul at the thought. Day and night, they held council without deciding anything. In the meantime, they beheld the July cloud raising its head in the south. That was a signal—the season of rain was at hand. Something must be done, before the heavens drew sheets of water like walls of impregnable moonstone between India and Ceylon.

Seeing the monkeys wavering, at the first flush of dawn, Angada announced, "O citizens of Kishkindha, I beg permission to leap over the ocean. I wish to vindicate the honour of our tribe."

Hanuman, who had been silent all the time, said, "No, prince, thou art the future ruler and may not risk thy dedicated life. If anyone is to go across, it is I."

Angada answered, "I have yet to prove my prowess. Let me scale this fence of jade."

"Then," said Hanuman, "let us decide it thus." Hanuman explained his plan: "I go first. If I do not return in a week, come thou after me. Rama gave me his signet ring, which shows that he intended me to cross the Indian Sea. But I know if those Rakshasas see me, they will prevent my return. Thou, prince, may come to rescue me, and I promise to remain alive at least a week. In this manner, shalt thou have thy

coveted chance and prove thyself brave beyond any doubting. Let me leap across on the morrow."

Ere the Sun's wheels had churned the waters, and his fire had smitten the sea into myriad iridescences, the ape, sired of the Storm, leaped into the sky. The shore fell under him until it looked flat as an ivory blade. The crags and cliffs that appeared as the tousled heads of giants now were dwarfed to the size of a tasselled larch. At last, even the summits of Rama Giri flattened under him into huts of yellow thatch in the dawning light. Still higher, rose Hanuman and looked about him. Nothing, nothing before him but the terrible wilderness of water, savage with heads of sharks and dragons that had seen him from afar. They bared their teeth, large as swords, and smacked their scaly lips. At such a sight, shivers ran through the Storm-god's son. He swiftly inclined his line of flight to the south, then closed his eyes.

"Land, land, land at any cost," he said to himself, "where I shall not have to see those devouring sea beasts."

Before the short morning twilight was over, he had gone so far that his comrades could see him no more. When he opened his eyes again, he saw the Sun rise like a mountain of gold, and on its throat and chest hung the sea, an ornament of scorching beauty.

Hour after hour, he flew, and yet there was no sight of Ravana's ravishing city. Alas, his strength was failing him and the sea seemed to draw him, as it sprang

to the horizon and licked from the sky the red of sunset. Against that terrible witchery, he struggled as a bird, ere the serpent's eyes hypnotise it. Once he almost fell to the sea, but the chattering teeth of sharks below steadied him. He shut his eyes and flung upward. At last, after what seemed like a night of blindness, he drew his eyelids back into his head and lo, before him rose the diamond towers of Lanka, high as Himalaya where day still lingered, too reluctant to yield the world to night.

With a shout of "Rama, Rama," he plunged forward and as an eagle lands in his eyrie under the shadow of a high hill, he softly descended on the sand under the diamond tower, while far away, the sea echoed like the sound of a receding dream.

CHAPTER VIII

HANUMAN IN LANKA

WITH a shiver of pleasure at the thought of his safe arrival, Hanuman scrutinised the capital of the monster kingdom. Under a long wall hung the branches of sky-soaring coco-palms, whose green, gemmed with the sunset colours, spread like a forest of peacock fans. Above them stretched the walls of Lanka, piercing with their turrets and towers the purple clouds in the sky. There between them crouched well-armed Rakshasa sentries like lions crouching between tall reeds.

Before such a sight, Hanuman's heart quailed. "How

can I reach Sita beyond those sky-piercing walls?" Fortunately, he stood in the shadow and the watchman of Ravana saw him not from those great heights whence they looked afar. Soon the short tropical twilight passed, and all the world was wrapped in the black silence of night.

Hanuman was so fatigued that he slept through the entire night, without being disturbed by the "surge and thunder of the seas." When he woke in the morning, he saw the Sun like a red bull charge through the sapphire forest of water and thrust his horns into the sky. The heavens shed red glory for a while: then all the world was white. But, today, the glory of the sunrise could not charm him, for Hanuman was hungry, and he, the storm-born, felt as if ten thousand wolves were howling for food within him.

"Food, food, food," he heard himself say.

He looked up at the cocoanut trees. Lo, there was food! No sooner seen than done, and in one spring he was on the treetop, splitting cocoanuts open with his knuckles and eating their meat. In half an hour, Ravana's city woke up and his sentries hurled spears at Hanuman, but he dodged the sharp weapons as if they were feathers falling slowly.

That so enraged the sentries that they flung at him other weapons—arrows, bolts, discs and maces. Instead of taking them seriously, the son of storm leaped about briskly and ate cocoanuts as if he were at a picnic. Now, in order to dodge a flying harpoon, named ser-

pent-mouth, he leaped higher than before, and as the fiend's weapon hissed and flashed beneath him, that titanic monkey beheld over the walls of Lanka Amra Kanan—a mango grove, bent down under the weight of ripe mangoes. The sight drew him like a magnet. Instead of coming down on the cocoanut tree, he swung up and over the walls of Lanka, his tail knocking off a star from the sky which no human eye could see. That mammoth heavenly body fell halfway between India and Lanka and made an island in the ocean. But Hanuman did not see the star fall or the seas churn and foam like a vat of boiling water as they received it. He beheld only mangoes. In an instant he had landed in the midst of them and was lost to the Rakshasa watcher's view. Unaware of every danger, he sat down to finish his breakfast with the red, yellow, purple and saffron fruits. He ate as a forest fire devours trees. In an hour's time, half the mangoes of Lanka were reposing within him, while all the Rakshasa gardeners were chasing him from tree to tree.

Now that his hunger was appeased, Hanuman recalled that he had come to Lanka, not to play hide and seek with gardeners, but to find Sita. Loath to give up annoying the Rakshasas, he leaped out of sight.

"Where can I find her, where shall I seek?" He repeated these words the greater part of the morning. In palaces, grottoes, and pleasure-gardens, everywhere, he looked, but he found no trace of Sita.

In Ravana's own vast halls, he saw all kinds of

monster females, but no human soul. On the roofs, in the late afternoon, where the ladies of Lanka had come to take the air, he spied not one who resembled Rama's bride.

"Where is Sita? How to seek her? Where to find Rama's queen?" He spoke to himself without receiving a response from within. At sundown, he gave up all hope and decided to spend the night on the steepest tower of the royal palace where no sentry prowled. Though he was worried and anxious, he slept like a child.

On the morrow, when he opened his eyes, the vision of the dawn-swept Lanka ravished him. Ravana's abode was all gold; the fountains about it were fashioned from crystal and their blue waters fell like the voices of thrushes. Deodars fanned the air above the singing fountains. In the courtyards and halls of gold, gods still captive, and dressed in celestial vestures, toiled, sweeping and polishing pillars and floors.

Looking away from Ravana's palace, he saw the Crown Prince Indrajit's house of amethyst. Its ivory walls were ornamented with topaz and onyx. No matter where he looked, opulent beauty choked his senses. No man nor monkey had ever seen anything like Lanka save in dreams. But even such enchantment could not dull his desire for food. He was hungry again, and in a moment's time, he was eating the rest of the mangoes of Amra Kanan.

CHAPTER IX

HANUMAN SEARCHES FOR SITA

A FEW of his divine powers, Pavana, the Wind-god, was allowed to retain when he was born as Hanuman the monkey. He could still increase or decrease the size of his body. At will, he could grow small as a squirrel or big as a mountain.

Now, while he was feasting in the mango grove, he decided to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, in order to continue his hitherto unsuccessful search for Sita, and so he shrank into the size of a very small monkey. Thus, he was hidden by the prodigious foliage of Lanka's many trees, and he had an opportunity to look and listen.

At night, he crawled, soft as a python, to palace windows and heard what the Rakshasas said to one another. In the daytime, he stayed hidden in a tree near the royal household, and listened to the gossip that went on there. High and low, he searched, but, alas, could not find any sign of Sita. She was not in Ravana's palace, nor could he locate her in one of the many palaces of the demon-king. He sought to find her in the state prison so he crawled thither small as a mouse, but no Sita could he discover. Where then was Rama's beloved wife? Was she alive?

That question filled his heart with gnawing misgiving.

"Has Ravana killed her because she refused to be his wife?" asked Hanuman of himself. "Woe, woe unto me for arriving in Lanka too late," he wailed to himself. "If indeed she be dead, I must have certain proof of it."

This thought quickened his flagging will and mind. He sat awhile in his fortress of leaves on a tree and meditated. Since all clear conclusions come from meditation, Hanuman soon arrived at a lucid plan.

"Suppose Sita is alive, the only person to know of her whereabouts is Ravana." He thought further, "I shall therefore follow that monster wherever he goes day and night, for some time; eventually I am positive he will wend his way to Sita's dwelling place, and I shall thus discover her."

He thought as monkeys do, and stumbled upon the

truth. But because monkeys are more prone to action than men, he acted swiftly and followed Ravana two days and two nights, without food or sleep. As if the privations that he had suffered were the just price, fate now granted him what he was searching.

The third day he followed Ravana to the Asoka forest. Ravana drove in his chariot of gold that glided into the emerald woods like the setting Sun into the green wilderness of the sea. In order to keep up to the vehicle drawn by demon horses, who were faster than the wind, Hanuman leapt from trees and towers with great haste. Sometimes he coursed on the ground like a squirrel limbed with the lightning. Ravana drove alone, unaccompanied by his vigilant guard, and so, through no art of his own, Hanuman escaped detection, for Ravana's ten pairs of eyes were fixed upon his steeds.

Soon they reached the heart of the Asoka forest where, guarded by grotesque female demons, the captive Sita dwelt. After tying his horses to a tree, Ravana passed through cohorts of terrible grotesques and gained the presence of Sita. Hanuman, who had climbed to the top of an Asoka tree, at last beheld her.

"The very moon fallen from heaven," he said to himself, as her beauty charmed his eyes.

The ugly guardians who held her captive were as ugly as she was beautiful. Though she was pale, too pale even for pity, the light of purity that shone on her face shamed the Sun. One glance at her human

form told the monkey messenger from Rama that he was in the presence of a divine being. Even had his eyes been deceived, his ears now heard the truth, for Ravana was speaking through his ten sets of teeth to Sita!

"Sita, if you do not love me, and will not marry me on the morrow, I will have thine eyes plucked from thy head." Though he waited for an answer, the queen of Rama disdained to reply. "Thy face shall be scratched into the very image of ugliness and then I will send thee back to thy husband, Rama. Blind, ugly and terrifying, thou wilt be ruined in his eyes. Take my warning! Renounce Rama. Love me and be my queen."

"I can love you on one condition only," slowly spoke Sita. Those words pierced Hanuman's heart like the swiftest poisoned blades. He repressed a cry of horror with great difficulty. Alert as a tiger for its prey, he listened for further words from Sita.

"My condition is that you in your own person become Rama whom alone I worship. In my heart is engraved Rama, in my soul is engraved Rama, in my bones is Rama. In my veins Rama runs. He is in my blood, in my brain, in my soul. I can love only that which is within me. Therefore, only if you become Rama, can you win my love."

Ravana howled with anger. His ten mouths shouted all at once, like a tenfold thunderclap, "I am a wizard, and I could easily take on the form of Rama, but such

tricks I utterly despise. I want to be loved as Ravana."

"Even if the Sun is plucked by a child, even if a lunatic empties the ocean into a cup, even if a rabbit's whimper slays a lion instantly, even if the sky grows like grass under our feet, Sita will not love Ravana. Begone from my presence. Plague me no more. O Rama, where art thou? O Rama, come to my rescue!" Sita wailed, repeating the name of her lord.

Though her words flowed out of a heart in torture, they sent pangs of gladness through Hanuman's spirit. "I have at last found her. My journey to Lanka has not been in vain," he said within himself.

Ravana now gave some orders to his grotesques and drove off in anger and shame.

With the coming of noon, all of Sita's guards went to their dinner and for a long siesta which was the custom of the Rakshasas, as of all peoples, who dwell in the south. Slowly through a path between the Asoka trees, came a young woman of great beauty, bringing Sita her dinner on a platter of gold. She saluted Sita with great humility, "Thou must eat, dear friend, just to keep alive. Thou must not die of starvation before the news of thee reaches Rama."

"O Sarama, my only friend in this serpent's nest, were it not for thy kindness, I would have died long ago. But how can I eat such delicacies when I know not if Rama lives at all."

"Try, beloved lady. Eat a little of the rice with cocoanut curry, a little of the baked bread, if it please

"Thou must not die of starvation before news of thee reaches Rama."

thee, and the Luddoo (a sweet made of cheese and almonds). Nourish thyself to give me pleasure, dear friend."

Thus coaxed and cajoled Sarama, the noble wife of Vivisana, Ravana's righteous brother, and the wife of Rama ate. But what she ate was so little, that Hanuman, who was watching her from above, was alarmed.

He said to himself, "She can not live long if she pecks at her food like an absent-minded sparrow."

Soon came Sarama's maids to escort her back to her palace. Instead of letting one of them carry the plate that she had brought with her, Sarama bore it away. This she did, as a mark of her esteem for Sita. After seeing that no one was guarding Sita, and making sure that he himself was not being spied upon, Hanuman came down from his perch, bowed very low before the bride of Rama and said, "Rejoice, Mother," paying her the same homage that men give to God, "I bring you news of your husband."

"Who art thou?" Sita cried in dismay. "Art thou another monster in disguise sent to torture me with tales of Rama?"

"Hush," whispered the monkey, "I am no Rakshasa in disguise. I bring you news of Rama. Fear naught, O pinnacle of purity; put your trust in me."

"Though thou art no Rakshasa," whispered Sita, "how do I know that thou truly hast brought news of Rama?"

"Look, O incomparable one. Behold, I wear Rama's

ring on my hand. Bring your scrutiny to bear upon it. O Mother, I am but your son, a slave of Rama, the backbone of truth. Is not that his ring?"

Sita took the signet and put it on her finger. The very touch and fit of it unlocked tears from her eyes, blotting out all sight. "Rama, Rama, Rama," that is all that she could say. Hanuman, the bravest of the monkeys, shared her sorrow and wept with her.

Soon the grotesque guardians of Sita were heard yawning into wakefulness, like palm-fronds in the wind. Hanuman swiftly disappeared into a tree. Now that he had found the Asoka forest, he decided to dwell there for several days in order to learn from Sita's lips how she was kidnapped and how she could be taken back to her husband.

Every day at the appointed hour, he beheld Ravana's golden chariot. Every day, Ravana came to plead with Sita to give up all thought of Rama. Videha's daughter seldom made reply, but when the monster irritated her most by praising himself highly, she would answer him thus, indignant and unafraid:

"The bridge of right, the wearer of the garment of truth, Rama—his shoulders are set like mountain sides, his arms are stronger than a thousand tigers' limbs. He will fall and tear thee, as the eagle swoops to catch a viper and makes ribbons of its slimy body. Rama's arms, like the talons of the thunderbolt, would seize and destroy many fiends like thee. Begone, thou ten-headed creeping beast."

"How can Rama slay me when the weapon that destroys Ravana is in the Creator's keeping?" Ravana set to bragging anew.

But Sita cut him short: "Though neither God nor fiend has power to smite thee down, yet from Rama's hands will leap the weapon that will end thy life of vice and sin. Begone, thou loathing's very soul!"

Thus, each day, Ravana, the compeller of the deities, was spurned by a woman.

CHAPTER X

SITA'S TALE

WHENEVER the watching Rakshasas fell asleep or relaxed their vigilance, Hanuman came down from his nest of concealment and listened to Sita's story.

She said: "It is myself that I blame, it is myself alone that I curse for sending away my brother Lakshmana, to assist Rama that day. Do not fail to tell Rama for me that our brother did as I bade him. Not blame but praise must be given that youth who is devoted to duty, as the shores to the sea. Even when he left me at my own bidding, he drew a magic circle of protection through which no earthly or celestial foe could reach me. Thus, he did all that lay in his power to protect me.

"But Ravana, the demon, was more artful that day than all. He came to the edge of the magic circle, disguised as a human hermit. He came forward from be-

hind some trees, which had hitherto concealed him, begging for alms and saying, 'I am a holy man who has lost his way in the jungle. I am foot-weary, travel-sore, hunger-pierced and thirst-tortured. Acquire merit, store up treasures in the hereafter by giving me food and drink.'

"When I said that I was forbidden to go out of the protecting ring which Lakshmana had drawn about me, he said, 'I know who thou art. If Rama and his dutiful brother return and hear that thou hast not given food and drink to a holy man, they will surely be accursed. It has been inscribed in the sacred book of law that he who refuses hospitality to any man hungry and thirsty, shames his whole family and by that act, draws his ancestors down from Heaven and casts them into hell. Wouldst thou bring such a curse upon thy husband and his family?'

"When he saw me still hesitating, he raised his hands in a gesture of cursing, and shouted, 'Bring forth rice and water to this side of the magic circle or I shall pronounce a withering curse on thee and thine.'

"A thousand spectres of fear galloped through my heart. Blinded by them, shorn of all cunning, I hastily gathered some rice in an earthen plate and ran forward. At every step I took, my feet seemed to cling to the ground as if mother earth herself—Dharitri—sought to hold me back. But my eyes saw only those two hands lifted in the ominous gesture of malediction. This goaded my spirit and I walked on. Seeing me hesi-

tate on the brink of the magic line of protection, he started to intone the withering curse. Terror-stricken, I stepped across and offered him the plate of rice.

"Instantly, those two hands dropped and I was caught in the twentyfold coil of a ten-headed python. I screamed and fought with my utmost strength. Alas, to no avail!" Sita wept bitter tears, as the memory of that moment rushed upon her. Who, save her alone, had known the horror of being caught in the twenty arms of a monster emerging out of a human form! The shock and terror of it cannot be told.

After she had dried her eyes, Sita resumed: "Swiftly, he lifted me to the sky where with several hands he held me down in an aerial chariot, while with the others he drove towards Lanka. In order to give Rama some sign of what had befallen me, I flung away ornaments and my veil hoping that he might come upon them and thus be guided to Lanka."

Then Hanuman told her of those tokens, and of the dying Jatayu, the bravest of birds, and how the monkey-folk of Kishkindha had unsealed to Rama what she had feared would remain eternally concealed. She who had banished all hope of rescue from her soul now was kindled again with hope.

"How fares Rama now? Who cares for him?" she questioned. "Who gives him and Lakshmana food and drink? How many monkeys tend those two, sun and moon on earth?"

CHAPTER XI

HANUMAN'S FAREWELL

BY WATCHING and listening to Sita for several days, Hanuman found out how her days were passed. Every morning, she was told that the Rakshasas were going to blind her eyes, cut off her ears, disfigure her face and mutilate her body. But strangely enough, they never carried out a single threat. Then the guarding grotesques would stand close to her and shout imprecations and curses. After that, they would put on ghastly masks and dance hair-raising, fearful dances. And last of all, Ravana would come and brag of his own glory. Sometimes he lied by saying that Rama and Lakshmana had been killed and devoured by demons.

Sita, the rock of patience, sat still, never noticing all the strange antics, repeated day after day with vari-

ations. One afternoon, while the guarding Rakshasas were having their siesta, Hanuman asked, "O Mother, tell me how you endure these strange beings?"

"I rarely hear or see them, son Hanuman. My soul tells me that if I notice them, it will be my undoing. So I never see, hear, nor taste their deeds or misdeeds. I say to myself, 'Rama, Rama, Rama!' The magic of his name beguiles me so that the cheap sorcery of these demons never touches me. What can mean their threat to kill me, who am bereft of Rama? How can their threat to blind me terrify me, when I am blind already, without sight of Rama's face? How can any sound move me, when I hear not Rama's footsteps on the path? I endure these Rakshasas and Ravana, as a cloud endures hawks and herons. The cloud is silent when they screech or clamour, for she is lost in the quest of her lightning lover. Rama, Rama, Rama! I seek thee within me and my senses are sealed."

"All this, shall I tell Rama when I return to him," exclaimed Hanuman.

"You must go to him soon, my son," she continued to Hanuman, "for he is fretting and pining for news of me. Tell him that I am not devoid of friends. Ravana has a brother whose name is Vivisana, and who is righteous and pure. It is his wife whom you have seen serving me. Sarama and I sit and pray often for Rama and Lakshmana. Inform my lord, the perfection of all qualities, that I am not friendless even in this Lanka of monsters."

"What else shall I tell Rama, O soul of purity?" begged Hanuman again.

"Tell Rama what you have seen. But beg brother Lakshmana, seven times ten, to forgive my rude words. Go to bring both of them hither, O my son, as soon as fate permits."

"Indeed, that, we monkeys will do," roared Hanuman, assuming his full size. "Lanka shall fall like a wall of reeds before the inundation of monkeys led by me. Ravana shall yield up the ghost. Then, in his aerial chariot, thou and Rama shall return to Ayodhya! Farewell, Mother, farewell."

Taking the dust from her feet, Hanuman leapt, and reaching the outer rampart of Lanka, crouched to spring over the sea to India.

In the meantime, the grotesques that guarded Sita had been roused by the monkey's roaring. Rising from midday sleep, they had given the alarm. Unseen Rakshasa sentries had sprung up, ready to guard the gold ramparts of Lanka by spells of wizardry and traps of sorcery, while other monsters set to whet their teeth, in order to feast on the corpse of Hanuman. All this was done very swiftly and with the strictest secrecy, ere Hanuman had left the Asoka forest.

Now just as Hanuman sprang up in the air to plunge into the sea, they cast their nets of blackest magic and caught him. Though his face was towards India, his whole weight dragged him down to Lanka. Net after net fell and caught him in its meshes, till it

seemed to him that every hair of his hide was trapped and held in a vise. His half-closed eyes dimly saw rows of monsters dancing with joy while their clamours and shouts proclaimed to his ears, "Monkey meat is delicious. Let us roast him for dinner." They twisted his tail grievously.

"I must think fast. Rama's trust, Sita's fate, and the honour of all the monkeys depend on my return to India. I must get back even if I have to burn Lanka. O Rama, give me strength! O Rama, illumine my mind." Thus prayed Hanuman's soul within him.

A burning, scorching pain shot through his body. Lo, the Rakshasas had set fire to his tail. They yelled, "Let him roast inch by inch. A slowly roasted monkey is the most toothsome meat in the world. Let him burn gradually like meat on a fire of chaff."

"Oh, the pain, the pain of it," groaned the trapped monkey.

That very instant, an idea shot through his head. He put it to work at once. He made himself as small as a mouse and crawled through one of the large meshes of the net. Though people pursued him in vast crowds, he fled fast, setting fire to everything that his tail touched. In a few minutes, and though he had vanished, fire leaped up from dry grass and forest leaves, and the smoke therefrom screened his fleeing body. As soon as he had outdistanced his pursuers, he took on his usual size. Now the Rakshasa beheld a flame-eyed angry monkey, vast as a thundercloud, brandishing

his burning tail like a chain of lightning. He applied it to granaries and houses, setting them on fire.

House after house, granary after granary, gardens, grottoes and palaces, in fact half of Lanka was one mass of encircling fire. As his tail came near the Asoka forest, and as he was just at the point of firing it, he suddenly remembered Sita. Instead of setting fire to its most inflammable trees, he held aloft his tail which burned like a torch in the presence of Videha's daughter. Quickly, he told her what had happened.

She commanded him to do no more damage: "Now that the Rakshasas are busy fighting fire all over Lanka, put out the fire from your tail, my son. Then leap to the sky and go forth to Rama. He awaits news of me. Fly, fly across the sea."

"Give me then a sign, Mother," said Hanuman. "My danger has made me think, and Rama will desire proof that mine eyes have verily beheld thee in the flesh. Please give me something to carry to him."

Sita slipped her wedding ring into his hand, while with enormous, puffed-out cheeks, he blew at his tail. Soon, he extinguished the flame. But alas, being a monkey and witless, he had brought his face so close to the flame that it was burned and blackened permanently. Even to this day in the forests of India, you can see Hanuman's direct descendants. They are the only monkeys whose faces are black. Had their first forebear kept his visage at a distance from his burning tail, they would not have had to wear dark faces today.

However, this is a badge of their service to Rama, and instead of considering it a shameful thing, they look upon it as the mark of their nobility, and hence, all other monkeys envy them their black countenances.

When he turned away from his tail and looked again at Sita, she cried, "O my son Hanuman, what have you done? Your face is black!"

"Never mind my face, Mother, it is my heart that is true to you and Rama. Farewell, with your blessings, farewell. I have the ring in my pouch. I will not devour it. Farewell."

He swallowed Sita's ring, then sprang to the ramparts of Lanka. Not a soul was there now. All the Rakshasas were busy fighting fire elsewhere. He crouched and then leaped, soaring up like an arrow racing to the heart of Heaven. Below him, Lanka looked like a black smudge, as he coursed over the sunset-sombre sea. The air was cold and keen as a razor, and this seemed to sharpen his wits. Hanuman swung forward towards India as he saw Dhruva,[1] the north star, swing to the horizon where the inky tropical night was lifting its brow.

All night, star after star rose to give him guidance. At last the moon rose. In order to acquire merit by serving Rama, she flung a silver path to guide Hanuman to Cape Comorin, the southernmost point of India.

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[1] For the origin and meaning of "Dhruva" see *My Brother's Face.*

When her office was fulfilled, the Sun rose. Like a tiger of gold, he sprang onto the eastern hills and revealed to the weary Hanuman's tired eyes, the shores of India dotted with thousands of monkeys performing their morning worship. He roared at them as he descended. They knew him by the sound of his voice, but what was it they saw upon his face?

They cried to him, "Hanuman, Hanuman!"

He descended rapidly.

"Welcome, welcome," they shouted, as he fell before them spent with pain and fatigue. But in that fatigue was a consciousness of peace and victory.

CHAPTER XII

RAMA AWAITS THE RETURNING OF THE MONKEY

IN THE meantime, the season of rain had reached its climax. Outside Lanka, where the gods were compelled to keep up a state of perpetual spring, the whole world was in the grip of storms and cloudbursts.

Far off from the land of the Rakshasas, oblivious to all enjoyment, Rama and Lakshmana spent their time near Kishkindha in meditation and conversation. Austere and serene, Rama had said to Lakshmana, "We must practise self-purification while we are imprisoned by the rain. Do thou, O devotion-filled youth,

listen to the falling of 'the silver straws from Heaven.' Behold, the sky is beleaguered with serried ranks of clouds. Thunders strike upon it with livid lashes. The sky groans in pain, yet it does not surrender its emerald summits.

"Look at the horizon—there Chakrabakas (swans), along with their mates, are tracing a certain path to their homes in the Himalayan lakes. Nearer, one hears, when the rain has stopped awhile, the gurgle and groan of waterfalls, heightened by the screech of wild peacocks. Cranes are lifting white sails on the green masts of the hills. The earth, rain-born and lightning-cleansed, appears in her jade mantle, shot with gems; seest thou the jewelled flowers in the grass, brother Lakshmana? And lo, birds are singing, though they are dripping with the cold rain! The far-off mutter of the thunderbolt is dulled by the sonorous humming of bees and guttural croak of frogs.

"That short interval is passed. Again the rain begins. The clouds have stormed the highest citadel of Heaven. No sun, nor moon, nor stars can be seen. All the directions, north, south, east and west, are as harps strung with strings of rain. Clearly manifest now, are the signs of the rainy season. My heart is heavy lest we sink into an abyss of sorrowing, and since our grief is caused by our dire fate, let us meditate to purify our hearts of woe, our thoughts of fear, and our souls of all lassitude."

Thus spent they the season of the rains.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MONKEY'S RETURN

ONE night after six weeks of the drumming deluge of the rain, Rama and Lakshmana remained awake, praying to God. Then suddenly, they beheld a silver plough pierce the cloud before them. It dug deep and darkly into the storm, until it pierced the heart of the abyss, then on its horns of gold-drenched crystal, lifted the blue sky and held it aloft.

"Behold the risen moon, O Rama," exclaimed Lakshmana. "The season of rain is vanquished!"

Rama looked carefully in all directions—north, south, east, west—and sniffed the air. The fragrance of the earth, the utter relaxation of the soil and the profound limpidity of the air told the princes that the season of peace and harvest was at hand. Now they heard the dawn-bird sing his matchless note of gladness and of calm. Far off, as if a giant were pulling the string of a titanic bow, Rama heard another sound.

Again it came, more distinctly, like the beat of an eagle's wings, slowly descending. It grew louder each passing minute, till from a sound of silver chord, it rose to the clamour of a storm. Lo, in the augmenting light of dawn he beheld Hanuman coming through the sky like a winged mountain. Lighter than a hawk, he landed at Rama's feet.

Hanuman, that supremely talented monkey, after telling the extraordinary story of his adventures to the end, showed Rama Sita's bridal ring. The very sight of it, like a bolt, split Rama's self-control and made him shed a flood of tears.

"Shall I see thee again, O my Sita? How can I live without thee? Canst thou endure the torture of the Rakshasas until I come and put this ring once more upon thy finger? O, Sita, if thou canst listen to the cry of my heart, do not give up hope. Pure and unstained as the moon-washed heavens, strong and untroubled as the Himalayan peaks, wait until I come to rescue thee." Then, he turned to the monkey. "O my friend, Hanuman, what can I confer on thee to show my gratitude? Lacking thee, Sita would be lost forever. Without thee, I would become as one without a soul: without thee, all of us would be as hollow as a skinless drum. We owe thee much, O my son; is there any favour that I can confer on thee? Speak!"

With tear-choked voice Hanuman, the sky-spanner, replied, "My soul is at peace because I have seen you, O tiger amongst men, and Sita, the glory of all woman-

hood. Having beheld you, I ask only to serve you and her, as long as I live!"

"That is granted, my son, for without thy companionship, I can not live. But ask something that is for thee alone to have and to enjoy."

Hanuman looked about, thinking what boon to ask. Lo, he saw his face reflected in a pool near by and was startled to see it as black as charcoal, and he spoke thus to Rama: "My Lord, it is said divinity resides in you. Whatever you grant, as boon, remains true and untouched by the dust of time. Grant me, then, this, that unlike other monkeys, mine own descendants always shall be born white, though black of face, exactly as I look now. The characteristic that I have acquired I want you to make eternal for all my line. I acquired this face in your service; therefore, now say the word that will carry this black mark of honour to my remotest posterity."

Rama pondered awhile. Then seeing in Hanuman's eyes a light of deep determination, he said, "So be it!"

Because Rama said those words, in the jungles of India today you can distinguish the noble qualities of Hanuman, for you will find them in the monkeys that wear black faces. They are the aristocrats of their race. Their clan is called Hanuman-Shakhachara—the best of the tree-dwellers.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MARCH TO LANKA

AFTER all the monkeys had assembled in Kishkindha under King Sugriva, Rama, Hanuman, Angada and Lakshmana made inspiring speeches to them and described exactly their coming march to Lanka. Last of all, spoke Sugriva, who urged them to uphold the honour of the monkey race, no matter where or how.

"On the morrow," the King concluded, "we march to Kanya Kumeri (Cape Comorin), the southernmost point of India. Now go home and say farewell properly to your families. Report for duty before the first sun-wing rises again above the gloom in the east!"

And the following day just as the eagle of dawn had begun to preen his golden pinions, with the clamour of a thousand storms, the monkeys set out for Lanka. They leaped over many trees with the agility of hawks. They cleared the rolling hills, as goats clear broken fences. They drank, bathed, and swam tawny rivers.

They passed as locusts spread over autumn fields. Distances vanished under their feet, like sugar into the mouth of a child. Rama and Lakshmana were carried on the backs of large monkeys who worked in relays. And ere the first day was done, they had covered a twentieth part of their journey.

No sooner had the sun risen and set seven times three, than the cohorts of Rama stood like clamorous forests on the edge of Cape Comorin. They roared and shouted so loudly with joy that the "surge and thunder" of the Indian Ocean was drowned, as a sparrow's chirp is stilled by the wind whistling in an eagle's wing. There they stood, two men surrounded by untold apes and baboons. Before them, mile upon mile, unfurled the blue banners of the sea. Wherever they peered, the waste of waters stretched into forbidding immensity.

After sunset, as soon as the bivouacs had been lighted and all the soldiers had been comfortably settled in their separate camps, Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Jambuban, Angada and Hanuman held a council of war. "How to span the ocean?" they questioned one another again and again.

Rama said, "We cannot leap over the ocean like thee, Hanuman. Only a few tree-dwellers have thy skill and strength. There is naught for us to do, but to build a bridge."

"A bridge on a vast ocean!" exclaimed Jambuban and Sugriva.

"How to span the ocean?" they

questioned one another again and again.

But the young, such as Angada and Lakshmana, said, "It will take a long time to make. By the time it is completed, Sita and most of us will have grown old and died."

Hanuman cried, "Why do I not leap over to Sita and bring her back on my neck? That will rescue her quickly and save us a long task of bridge-making."

Rama smiled at them all, and said, "It is not only for Sita's rescue that we have come, but also to put an end to Ravana and his demon-race. Sita is but one woman amongst many who are exposed to attack by the Rakshasas. It is not enough that we rescue her alone. We must destroy all Lanka and free all womanhood from the menace of Ravana. In order to do our task completely, we must have a vast army at Lanka's door. Sita must wait until we build a bridge on which our cohorts can cross and annihilate the Rakshasas utterly."

"Sadhoo, well spoken," shouted all his listeners. But Jambuban, the bear-headed monkey, who was Sugriva's Dewan (prime minister) counselled, "With all the monkeys working every day, every hour, it will take ten years to build that bridge to Ceylon. Ten years without fighting will undermine the heart of every soldier. Bridge-building will make pacifists of our warriors. O Rama, set not out upon thy plan to span the sea."

A sombre and profound pause followed. As if it were unbearable, Sugriva broke the silence. "I have pledged you, O Rama, that we shall rescue Sita for

you. But I see no reason that we should toil to free all humanity from the menace of Ravana."

Lakshmana answered, "King Sugriva, it is your head, not your heart that speaks so. Prudence is a dweller in the house of reason, a miserly tenant in a narrow home. But what Rama wishes is the truth. We should slay Ravana. Let us save not only Sita but all womanhood, by slaughtering the demon vipers, no matter how long it takes."

Then shouted Angada and Hanuman, "Thy words have converted us, O Lakshmana. We are devotees at the shrine of thy truth. Let the bridge be built."

"But ten years of civilian work will dry up the spring of our enthusiasm," reiterated Jambuban. "An army of civilians cannot fight demons. Ferocious soldiers are needed for that."

Another pause, more depressing than the previous one, followed.

The monkeys turned their faces toward Rama. Their instinct told them that he had a noble idea in his mind. That tiger-silencing one spoke softly like a mother to her children: "The bridge can be built in two years. We may have to besiege Lanka for at least ten years after that."

Sugriva grumbled, "How canst thou say that?"

"I have the means by which to do it," rejoined Dasaratha's eldest born. "Let us rest for the night with perfect peace. On the morrow, friends, we shall commence the building of the bridge."

The force behind Rama's simple words was so great that the meeting broke up without further discussion, and each monkey softly walked away to his camp to bed. Only the two men stayed together. Then, without speaking, Rama signed Lakshmana to meditate.

The two princes folded their legs and sat still, praying and meditating. The stars strode across the sky and faded. The giants of the jungle roamed and clamoured while the vast army of tree-dwellers slept. But the two men prayed for the help of Heaven, for the aid of all four-footed beasts, and for the co-operation of birds. They sought also the assistance of the Sun, the moon and the seasons.

Each by each, the souls of the sleeping birds and beasts answered, "We come, Rama, to aid you as you ask."

The heavenly bodies, too, answered, "Yes, we will help."

So while the world slept, its waking soul pledged Rama to be his slave. Such is the power that prayer and meditation can create! And because Rama was fighting to save not only his own bride, but all humanity, the whole universe was glad to espouse his cause.

Thus that memorable night was spent. And long before the red wheel of the Sun had churned the ocean into scudding gold, purple and amber birds were swarming with stones in their beaks; leopards and lions were flinging skulls and bones of their prey into

the deep; monkeys, row upon row, were pulling down trees and rocks; elephants were ploughing up earth with their tusks and flinging it with their trunks; even Makara (Leviathan) and his sea-concealed family rose to assist Rama in his bridge-building.

Last of all came the chipmunks. They begged to be of service. Rama with sweet thanks said, "Dip your bodies in the sea, roll yourselves in the sand, then go and shake the sand between the stones that the apes are joining together. Go, make mortar for me."

The chipmunks busied themselves at once. Lo, hardly a few minutes passed, when their chief crawled up to Rama's lap and said, "Some monkey flung a rock the wrong way and hit me. O Rama, I am dying."

But Rama said, "I will heal you," and he stroked the chipmunk three times with his hand. The previous night's meditation had given Rama so much power that healing passed out of him and made the little beast whole in a trice. But Rama's fingers left their marks on his body so that even now India's chipmunks wear coats of three stripes. Those are the finger marks that their ancestors received at the building of the Rama-setu or Rama-causeway to Ceylon.

The sea rose and fell but it was no longer heard; the sharp chirp of stones falling from bird-beaks, the crash and smash of rock and timber, the hissing of the surf, the hammering of boulder on boulder, the sinking of mammoth granite shafts in the deep, and the singing of those who worked and enjoyed work because they

could sing, drowned all else. Thus toil became a joy, and joy, a serenity of the soul.

The day ended and the night was no less like day, for the moon poured effulgence from above in answer to the prayer of Rama. So the beasts of night toiled as had done those of the day. The hammering of stone on stone rang louder than the storm smiting the sapphire-silver sea. So numerous were the beasts at work that they wrought with thunder-stilling fury. Though Rama slumbered, his friends toiled at night. Since they were not his slaves, they forged the stone chain on the sea, without regard to his presence or his absence. Toil became their joy. They loved him, hence they toiled, not lashed by overseers, nor cursed by leaders.

CHAPTER XV

LANKA BESIEGED

HANUMAN was the first to cross Rama's newly built bridge. He sped over it swiftly. Now, as an ambassador, he arrived at the court of Ravana. Ravana held court from a throne of amethyst in a palace of gold, and around him stood his sons and nobles. Before this mighty assembly, Hanuman announced that a bridge had been built between India and Ceylon, "and if by the second setting of the Sun, Sita be not returned to him, Rama will lay siege to Lanka."

Ravana's brother, Vivisana, kneeling in a gesture of profound humility and hiding his face on the jasper

floor of the court, was heard to say, "O, my liege, Lord and brother, listen to the supplication of one who weighs his words before he speaks. This man, Rama, who has bridged the ocean is no common mortal. He seems to be Divine Power in human disguise. I beg you to return Sita, his lawful wife, and save our precious Lanka."

"Ho, ho, ho," mocked Ravana. He laughed and patted his vast stomach with twenty hands. "If only I could keep my stomach from shaking with laughter. It hurts me. Brother Vivisana, I want to win Sita's love. Until that happens, she shall not return to Rama."

"That means, my lord, that she cannot return at all. But think what Rama will do to Lanka in order to rescue her."

In disgust Ravana grumbled, "Art thou, an immortal, afraid of this mortal from Ayodhya?"

"I am, your Majesty. I feel that we have done an unrighteous act. He who is guilty of such an act will perish even if he be immortal. I beg thee, return Sita to Rama!"

"Thou art a coward, Vivisana, and no brother of mine. I am no coward."

"I do not wish to anger thee, my lord. But ere the war begins, I beg thee to think upon my words. Rama has done his duty by sending his envoy, Hanuman. Thou hast committed a sin. Repent, and Rama will forgive thee. Repent!"

"Repent!" Ravana thundered through ten mouths.

"Begone!" Then he kicked Vivisana thrice, "Leave my presence, coward. I never repent."

Vivisana, who was reeling under the kicks, gathered his forces, composed himself and said quietly, "I go to Rama, but I leave this warning behind. If Lanka is burnt to ruin, it is because thy sinful act set it on fire. Farewell!"

Vivisana swiftly jumped on his Ratha (chariot) and urged his winged horses to fly over the ramparts of Lanka to the beach where Rama's army was encamped. There, as his feet touched the ground, he made the sign of truce. Then, giving his horses to an ape that was standing by, he asked to be ushered into Rama's presence. Since he was a truce-bearer, he was swiftly taken into a wooden cabin where Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Angada, Hanuman and Jambuban were making their plans of attack.

The moment Vivisana saw Rama, a flash of recognition lighted his mind for a moment. It seemed to him that he had seen a soul like Rama somewhere in a realm of perfection. But where and how, he could not recall. Then he became aware that Rama had spoken to him. "What brings thee here?"

A voice from within, prompting his outer voice, said, "I am Vivisana, Ravana's brother. I come to ask for sanctuary."

"Sanctuary at a mortal's hearth for you, an immortal?" exclaimed Rama.

"Ravana, my brother, has spurned me," explained

Vivisana. "I begged him to return Sita to thee, but he will not." Slowly, with a voice hoarse with humiliation, Vivisana told the entire story of his quarrel with Ravana. He asked to be enlisted in Rama's army since Rama represented right and his own brother wrong in this conflict.

Of course, as was the custom among noble warriors of those days. Rama gave him sanctuary. He and Vivisana swore fidelity to each other.

After that, Vivisana gave Rama tidings of Sita who was loved by his wife Sarama. Now both Sarama and Sita were held as hostages by Ravana. It was the common interest of Rama and Vivisana to destroy the ten-headed King of Lanka and rescue their respective wives.

Weary of waiting any longer, Rama gave the order for battle. The trumpets sounded far and near, sentries ran from camp to camp. Soldiers ran to their posts. Then, lo, the first cohort of apes leaped upon the golden ramparts of Ravana's capital and smote his sentries, as the storm smites a grain-field.

CHAPTER XVI

RAMA SUFFERS A REVERSE

AFTER Vivisana had left his presence, Ravana said to his courtiers, "Is there no one loyal amongst my vassals and friends? Are you all cowed by the sight of an army of these men and monkeys? Where is the heroism of Lanka? Who is there amongst you that can go forth, as my avenger, and spread terror among that rabble of beasts and men?"

Indrajit, the pride of Lanka's youth, the conqueror

of Indra,[1] the god of gods, stepped forward to speak to his father and king. His brow was haughtiness itself. His eyes were the very seat of anger and pride. His jaws were more sinister than a lion's. His arms were prowess and skill, become bone and muscles. As he walked forward with solemn dignity, his legs wore the grace of a birch and the strength of earthquakes. In fact, the very ground trembled under his lightning-shod feet. After bowing to Ravana with such elegance that might ensue, if the Himalayas bent before a mere mortal, Indrajit spoke. His voice rang like the far-off clamour of a flood.

"Majesty of Lanka, master of Paradise and all the worlds, allow my uncle, that coward, to be forgotten by us. Let Vivisana be erased from thy affection and thought. Without him, all Lanka is a home of heroes and naught else. Now permit me to go forth and slay those mortals. Permit me to lift the siege from Lanka. If I fail in the attempt, Uncle Kumbhakarna can be roused from sleep. He surely will devour the enemy, as the raging ocean, the ships. I await your word, O most noble of fathers!"

"Well spoken, O my son," Ravana rose from his throne and embraced Indrajit. "I behold in thy face the very force of death. Perform thy rites of sorcery. For without them, thou canst not hide behind the clouds. That magic, which is thine alone, must thou

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[1] Indra is the Jupiter of the Hindu mythology.

practise. Lift thyself to the high heavens. Hide thyself behind the clouds! Then strike down those men and monkeys at our gates, with the fierceness of a lion in a herd of cows. Go, my son; show them that Vivisana is an exception and not the rule of our Rakshasa clan." With those words, Ravana dismissed his court. Then he went to the Asoka forest to torture Sita with his pleas and prayers.

Indrajit betook himself to the woods and in profound secrecy began to perform his sorcery. In the meantime, on the outer ramparts of Lanka and till the sun went down, the monkeys held their own in a battle with demons that sought to overpower them.

All night long, Indrajit kept up his prayers, incantations and sacrifices. Hideous moans rose from the woods, as victim after victim was sacrificed by him. The very trees trembled at the demoniac arts that he practised in their midst. The horror of it was so great that the moon and the stars fled from the Heavens. Yet he continued to perform his magic.

At last at the dawn of day, and armoured with his power of sorcery, the conqueror of Indra shot up into the heavens and hid behind a cloud.

Soon arrows like stinging cobras fell from Heaven upon the monkeys and laid them low. In an hour's time, they were driven from the ramparts of Lanka, and had to rally on the seashore. There, too, from behind the cloud, the arrows poured like rain. None could see the bow, or who hurled the venomous shafts.

This so frightened them that their ranks broke, and all the monkeys ran to the bridge in search of India's shore. In the place of a disciplined army, now ran hither and yon, a mob of apes and baboons. Terror-stricken, fear-blinded, they fled. Lakshmana, who was in charge of them, aimed an arrow at the cloud. His arrow was named Spell-breaker.

"Behold," he shouted to his fleeing soldiers, "there is no longer any cloud."

Lo, the brother of Rama had sent such a weapon that, like a sun, it devoured the clouds . . . but no one was revealed. There seemed to be no person present in that spot of Heaven. This frightened the witless monkeys all the more.

"It must be a god, for we see no being there!" they screamed and ran like lunatics from an asylum.

But in another quarter of the sky, another cloud had grown quickly and from behind it, poured the death-fanged shafts, spreading slaughter through all. Lakshmana shot again a new spell-breaker. The second cloud vanished and revealed no one behind it. Anew, a third cloud was formed, and swiftly there poured arrows from behind it, blinding and killing many cowering monkeys.

Vivisana, who was with Rama, had seen it all. He was in consternation, and said to Rama, "That is Indrajit after Nikumbhila." He then explained how, after performing the Nikumbhila sorcery, that son of Ravana attained the power to act like a disembodied

spirit for three days. "Thus it was, when Ravana waged war on the gods. His son, after Nikumbhila, hidden even from the eyes of the gods, fought and conquered their chief, Indra. Since then, we call him Indra-conqueror, Indrajit."

"How can we fight such a foe?" asked Rama in dismay.

"The only way to fight him is to hide until it is dark. Then he can see nothing. At night his powers are useless, and in a day or two, the magic will run out of its potency and he will be obliged to return to the woods and perform Nikumbhila all over again. Give orders to hide to all your men, O Rama, for two more days."

In the meantime, again, Lakshmana had broken the spell of the third cloud and was watching the forming of the fourth. Around and about him lay dead and dying apes. It would have been easier to count the waves of the sea than to learn the number slain by Indrajit.

Ere the fourth cloud was quite formed, an arrow—named "Invisible Death," as Vivisana explained later—suddenly pierced Lakshmana and laid him low. None saw it come down. None knew how it entered the young prince's side.

The sight of Lakshmana's fall smote Rama into fury. He strung his bow and shot three arrows at once, and this was more than any man, demon or god could do. His first arrow set fire to Indrajit's cloud, his second arrow ran around the sky like a circling serpent of in-

candescence, and no matter where a cloud began to grow, it was at once set on fire. The third arrow spread a canopy of light decorated with stars between Heaven and earth. Now that all was dark, the demon could do no more damage. Baffled by Rama's magic, he went back to Lanka.

Having repelled Indrajit, Rama ran to where Lakshmana fell. There, livid and lifeless, lay the second son of King Dasaratha. Rama flung away his bow and quiver of arrows, then lifted that dear form as a mother her death-stricken child, and carried it into his hut. He was so saddened that he could not shed tears of grief. His eyes were dulled and dry as a desert at dusk.

Jambuban, the Dewan and doctor in one, examined Lakshmana carefully. In the light of the torches that had been lit, he worked. An hour passed ere Jambuban could pronounce his verdict. Rama, Vivisana, Sugriva, and Angada sat silently near the body of Lakshmana. Their example spread through the entire army. Even the smallest ape sat silent. Thoughts of retreat or advance fretted none; nor was there any listlessness among the wounded. Such was the power of silence in their midst.

At last, Jambuban spoke: "He will revive if someone can reach the Himalayas and bring from its peak Gandhamadan (Mount Everest) a lily-white herb. Its juice alone can save the life of the prince, if it be applied to his body before the next sunrise."

"Then he is as good as dead," groaned the heart-

broken Rama, "for the Gandhamadan is a thousand miles away from here."

"Grieve not, friend," pleaded Sugriva. "Listen to my advice. Hanuman can leap to the north and return in twenty-four hours with the white herb."

"But," answered Rama, "the sun rises and sets in twelve, O king of monkeys."

"Yea, but a monkey knows mathematics," ejaculated Sugriva, "this artificial light that thine arrow has made, how long does it last?"

"Half a day, friend Vivisana," answered Rama meekly.

"Good," exclaimed Vivisana, "that began at noon today. How much does that make?" Vivisana counted. "Six hours of artificial dark, then twelve of God's dark —canst thou go and return with the herb in eighteen hours?"

"Tell me in language other than hours," demanded Hanuman, impatiently.

Sugriva commanded, "It is noon now. Before another sun rises, fetch from Gandhamadan the lily-white herb. If thou returnest after that, thou wilt bring death to Lakshmana. Go, Hanuman. Tarry not. Go! Bring life to Lakshmana by returning hither before the Sun rises again."

"O my son," Rama begged, "save Lakshmana even if thou must keep the Sun from rising at all. Save him, save him."

Hanuman, after taking the dust from Rama's feet,

put it on his head. Then saluting Sugriva, he sprang into the air.

"Hoohum Hoo," he roared, scattering terror as he went. He coursed like a night bird. The sea below him smelt of salt. The stars hummed like bees above him. He knew what that sound meant. It was an eerie world in which he was moving, but it seemed to whet Hanuman's appetite for speed. By the time the real sun had set and the night of God had begun, he had not only crossed the ocean, but was crossing India lengthwise. Before midnight, he had landed on the Chitrakuta hills and rested a few moments.

Then, gathering fresh momentum, he leaped into the abyss of stars before him. In an hour's time, he passed Ayodhya on the bank of the Saraju. A pang shot through his heart as he heard Bharata and Satrughna walking up and down their palace roof and speaking of "brother Rama, sweet Videhini Sita and the courage-armoured Lakshmana."

He almost descended before them to speak of Lakshmana's state but at the thought that he alone could kill or cure that incomparable prince, Hanuman sped on.

"A moment wasted now may mean Lakshmana's death," he muttered to himself. The thought dug into his spirit a fresh goad, and he flew northwards, swifter than the swiftest flight of man's mind.

Just at midnight, he saw Alaka, now the deserted city of the gods in the Himalayan peaks. All its inhabi-

tants were now captive in Lanka. It was ghastly! A human city without any inhabitants frightens one. But think of the desolation of divine Alaka without its gods! In sheer terror Hanuman sped over the diamond streets of Alaka, its houses of Padmaraga and other most precious stones. All its towers of carnelian, its battlements of chrysoprase, were covered with dusk. Stillness and hungry echoes coiled around the city of the gods. The more he saw of it, the more he disliked it. Unable to bear the horror of it any longer, he shut his eyes and swept forward with all his might. Behold, he was going forward faster than ever, in a lightning-outracing stride.

Now feeling that he had passed Alaka, he opened his eyes again. What he saw absorbed his thoughts a long while. No higher than the leap of a lad, there stood before him Gandhamadan, the highest peak of the world. On its shoulder the sky seemed to be like a leather mantle (Charmavat akasa), embossed with planets and stars. What a sight!

But Hanuman, having come on an errand of mercy, could not very well tarry to behold the beauty of the highest Himalaya. He swung around the haughty peak, looking for a particular cave where grew the magic vine. It took him a long time to locate it. But once seen, there could be no mistake about its identity. In a cave of lilac shadows, he perceived the vine rising in thick long lines of milk-paling lustre. He prayed to the herb-god before plucking it. Thus after propitiating its

deity, he plucked a tendril. He bowed three times to show his gratitude and respect.

Slowly, he walked towards the cave mouth. There, the tired monkey rested his limbs a moment. Alas, there is no rest for him who is wicked nor for him who is bent on an act of mercy. Literally unable to rest, Hanuman shouted "Jai, Jai, Rama," then sprang into the air. In one swoop he cleared the shoulder of the Gandhamadan, and ere one could say, "He is scaling the stars," that monkey had set out on his return journey. Past the sleeping Ayodhya, beyond the Vindhya Mountains, leaping over the sapphire Nilgiti peaks, he coursed to the southernmost point of India. He was at the threshold of success now.

Just then he beheld a blood-freezing sight. The Sun was tinting the sea-edge with a drop of fire. Hanuman stuck his hand right under the sea, took the Sun like a ripe fruit and put it under his arm.

He said, "I will keep thee from rising, O Sun, until Lakshmana is cured. Rama so desires it."

"But I suffocate under thy arm," moaned the Lord of the Day.

"It is better that thou shouldst choke than I lose the life of Lakshmana," answered Hanuman.

"But the world needs my light, thou brainless monkey," raged the Sun.

"Let the world wait a few hours for once. That will teach it patience," rejoined Hanuman.

"Listen," whimpered the Sun. But Hanuman, refus-

ing to listen, flew over the Indian Ocean in whose tranquil depth he saw leviathans, dolphins, sharks and Ananta, the phosphorescent serpent; all playing like children.

At last, hot, weary and travel-sore, he descended at the feet of Rama who had kept watch over Lakshmana.

He told Rama, "Squeeze the herb and spread its juice over your brother, while I struggle with the God of Day, and keep him from rising." He added in a matter-of-fact tone, "The beacon of day is making my feet very hot."

The Sun was furious. As he fought for release, he kept on saying: "Thou filthy monkey. One of these days I will scorch thy hide as black as thy face. Let me go, I tell thee."

"He breathes, he breathes," shouted Rama.

Those words sent such a thrill of joy through Hanuman's body that his arms became weak and helpless. That instant the Sun fled from his grip and flew to the sky. Lo! it was almost midday. Now that he saw why Hanuman had kept him from rising, the Sun forgave that noble monkey his trick.

The news of Lakshmana's cure ran like a forest fire through the army. The very sea resounded with shouts of joy.

CHAPTER XVII

DEATH OF KUMBHAKARNA

AFTER performing the Nikumbhila rites again, Indrajit came once more to give battle. This time at the very outset, Rama shot his three famous arrows and spread night between that sorcer prince and his own army. That prevented the latter's slaughter by Indrajit and made him retire within Lanka's gates, without accomplishing his end.

But he made a third attack, shouting, "This time I

will un-Rama and un-Lakshmana this world. I will bring Uncle Vivisana a prisoner to my father."

But no sooner had he hurled a score of arrows from his hiding place in the sky, than Rama with his wizardry spread black night between Indrajit and the earth. The darkness, sweet and soft, proved harder than the thunderbolt to the Rakshasa's cunningest arrows. Frustrated anew, he withdrew into Lanka, as he had done before.

Seeing Indrajit balked of his purpose so easily, Ravana now thought out another plan of campaign. He gave orders for his giant brother Kumbhakarna, with ears large as wine vats, to be roused from his sleep. Since Vivisana had gone over to Rama's side, there was no one in Lanka who had courage enough to contradict Ravana by telling unpleasant truths. So, they did as he had ordered, knowing full well that the vat-eared giant was invincible at war, only when he had slept full six months. But if he were roused even an hour earlier than that span of time, he would be vulnerable. Alas, nobody had the courage to say all that to the mad monster King.

But did not the King know it himself? He did. Yet nothing deterred him: he was doom-hurried. And when a soul is rushing towards his doom, he reasons as madmen do. Ravana had said to himself, "Rama is but a man; he can be killed by Kumbhakarna whose eyes see in day or night. In order to fight a common man, a

giant does not need to be wholly invincible. My brother will tear Rama limb from limb, as a boy splits a river reed. And for Kumbhakarna, what a dinner of monkeys as delicious as the fruits they live upon! So rouse the vat-eared," he thundered, "let us fill him with a herd of luscious apes."

But it was not easy to rouse a sleeping giant out of season! All the noises of all the demons could not make him stir in his sleep, much less waken him. Drums, large as oak tree trunks; cymbals, big as an elephant's ears; gongs, deep as ten-fold tiger roar; a forest of horns, each one throated with the bellow of a thousand bisons,—yet they could not pierce the giant's brain. Blare upon blare of trumpets, the howl of crashing cymbals noisy as maniacs caught in a burning house and the groan of gongs, though they almost shook the Sun out of the sky, could not rouse Kumbhakarna.

Now to the ever-augmenting noises, they added tortures. Hundreds of Rakshasas pulled his hair, scores pulled his beard, some hung from his eyebrows like bats in a dark castle, while others set fire to his bedding. Still others pressed burning brands into his legs, arms and neck. Last of all, a thousand demon boys scratched the soles of his feet with hot needles in order to tickle him out of sleep.

This last attempt succeeded. Suddenly those monstrous feet moved, the toes, long as fire-tongs, wiggled. Then a shiver went through the rest of Kumbhakarna,

like a lightning shock through a mountain range. At last he was waking! A shout of jubilation rose all over Lanka.

"The killer of Rama is awake," the Rakshasas chorused so loudly that even Rama's whole army heard it, though they were beyond heaven-high walls of the capital.

And when Vivisana heard it, he told Rama every secret of Kumbhakarna's life, ending as follows, "In conclusion, bear this well in mind, O King amongst men, had the vat-eared slept his fill of six months, he would be immortal for a day. Then he could destroy everything without being destroyed by any. This boon, God Shiva granted him years ago. But, alas, Ravana's doom-clouded brain does not think properly any more. Kumbhakarna has been awakened prematurely. He is vulnerable. Thou canst slay him. O Ravana, why didst thou steal another's lawful wife? Why didst thou bring death to our Lanka?"

Hardly had Vivisana finished speaking, when over the walls of Lanka leaped a shape, too terrible to see. His head touched the sky. His eyes were large as the sunset. His nostrils belched forth black smoke whose poison killed everyone who came near it. His legs, thick as a hundred elephants, agile as tigers, kicked and killed a thousand apes at a time. His arms, curved like far-flung mountains, crushed baboons and ourangs, as a man kills flies. And every time he opened his mouth and drew a breath, through it, flocks of chimpanzees

were sucked in, as a whirlpool draws down ships into the deep.

As he ate them, the monster shouted, "Monkeys taste sweet."

He spread terror and death into Rama's army. In less than half a day, a quarter of his entire strength was eaten by the vat-eared fiend. Lakshmana's arrows pierced not even his skin. Only some of Rama's best shafts told at all, and even they, not mortally. It seemed as if nothing would prevail against him. At last, seeing almost all his followers run away pell-mell, Rama jumped on Hanuman's back and urged him forward, "On to battle, my son. Help me to slay the monster; you bite his legs, while I smite his face, arms and neck. Run! Quick, ere we are all eaten by him."

With a roar that out-roared Kumbhakarna's, Vir (hero) Hanuman grew as large as the former, then plunged forward. He buried his large teeth into the Rakshasa's thigh. The latter's pain made him yell a sky-blasting shout. That instant Rama hurled his Dambholi, thunder-javelin, into the vat-eared's open mouth. Blood spurted out of it like a river, almost deluging Rama and his mount. Now the Rakshasa smote Rama on the head with a living monkey that he had lifted by its limbs. This nearly knocked Rama off Hanuman's back. But he balanced himself and swiftly smote Kumbhakarna with his battle-ax, cutting off his right arm. It fell, crushing many monkeys under it.

The giant, whose other arm was squeezing Hanu-

man's throat, let go of that, in order to bring it down upon the head of Rama. Seeing the blow descend, that artful warrior leaped off Hanuman's back and escaped the stroke. Then, as a man lops off an elephant's trunk with his axe, he cut the vat-eared's remaining hand at his elbow. And where it fell, it crushed to death a host of chimpanzees. Not yet unnerved, the grim Rakshasa swung his stump and hit Hanuman on the head till the latter dropped senseless as a woman in a swoon. Just then, Rama thrust a spear into Kumbhakarna's throat and followed it with a stroke of his axe that brought down the giant's head which fell not on land but into the blue black sea whose waters rose fifty fathoms, foaming and sizzling like a cauldron of boiling milk. Slowly swayed the rest of Kumbhakarna. At last, it fell backwards against the heaven-high walls of Lanka, whence rose a wail of sorrow and despair from innumerable throats of fiends who had been watching the onslaught.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RUSE OF INDRAJIT

AT THE death of Kumbhakarna all Lanka was plunged into mourning. They mourned his death for months. No warrior issued from its gates to give battle to Rama's hosts, nor did the wind waft over its walls any sound of pleasure and peace from the besieged city. Ravana wailed with sorrow as his twenty eyes shed tears.

"O my Kumbhakarna, O my brother, canst thou forgive me for prematurely rousing thee from thy slumber? Wilt thou ever forgive my sending thee from a couch of sleep to thy death? O my reason, how couldst thou devise such a conduct? O my fatal word, how couldst thou issue from my mouth and send that king of giants to his death? O, my beloved vat-eared brother, where art thou now? Who accompanies thee in thy wanderings in the world beyond our human state?"

The lament of Ravana was taken up by all his family. Every Rakshasa made lament for the departed hero. Even Indrajit, that hardest of heroes, wept like a child for days. Every day was as ashen and without warmth as every other, for nearly a month.

"Ah, Kumbhakarna, O Kumbhakarna," that is all they said and could say.

But the Vanaras (monkeys) of Rama who had allowed a month's truce to the sorrowing demons now began to hammer at the gates of Lanka. Sugriva flung mountains at it, as a boy throws stones. Angada hurled big deodars (cedar trees) like spears. Hanuman butted on Lanka's walls with his hard head, till they began to shake, while Rama and Lakshmana, with the help of the rest of the monkeys, began to build a wooden wall over which Rama intended to transport all the army into the golden town of Ravana.

In order to prevent them, the numerous sons of the Rakshasa King came forth and gave battle to the hosts

of Rama. On fire-hued aerial chariots, they came and wrought havoc among monkeys and men. Day after day, month after month, the numerous progeny of Ravana's many wives fought and perished in their effort to stem the tide of their conquering foes. Months rolled into years. Yet, apparently, weak men and apes were not beaten and flung into the seas.

Ravana grew more and more impatient as son after son perished in battle. His sorrow rose steeper as the corpses of the Rakshasas grew more numerous in the field of battle. He became so restless and angry that he ordered his watchers to inflict fresh tortures on Sita in her forest prison. Even so, that diamond of purity did not break down, nor did she give up her vow to remain true to Rama.

At such a juncture, Indrajit devised a cruel plan of attack on the besiegers of Lanka. Through wizardry, he placed a perfect likeness of Sita before himself on his chariot, and then leading an enormous number of Rakshasas, he went forth to battle. He set out without doing his Nikumbhila yajna, which alone could make him immune from death. But he was so angry that he did not mind being careless.

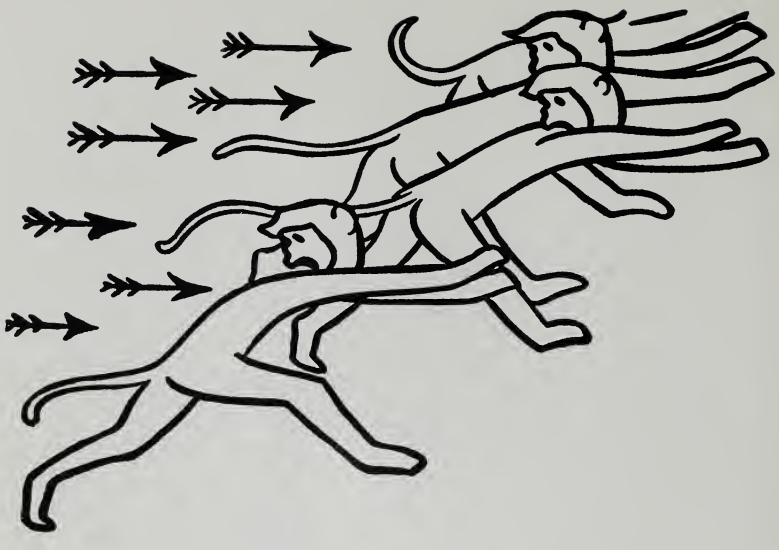
He showered arrows of dire force—jarapasa, disease shaft; mrityu, the javelins of bitter death. Monkeys fell under the blows of his axe, as saplings under an elephant's trunk. Even Hanuman was so wounded that he could not fight any more.

Hosts of Rakshasa, falling upon the chimpanzees and baboons, devoured them like carrots. Between their hands, the fiends cracked small monkey-skulls as an ape cracks a walnut between his fingers. They fed upon Rama's army like famine and plague. As the storm-fanged sea devours skiffs and cockleshells, the demons sucked in the monkeys. And not one of them dared hurl a stick or stone for fear that they might strike Sita. The intrepid Rama and Lakshmana could not rally their followers, for they themselves were unmanned, when they beheld her visage on the prow of Indrajit's Rath.

Suddenly, making sure that Rama had seen him, and amid a universal carnage of apes by Rakshasas, Indrajit drew his sword and cut off Sita's head which fell in two from the chariot to the beach, and lay as lifeless as the sand. It was a terrible sight. The horror of it was so great that even the vultures of the air flew away from it, hiding their heads in their wings. Hawks and eagles, in order to spare their eyes, rose higher and higher till they could see nothing. Not only birds, even crocodiles, sharks, and Makara—leviathan—sank deep into the water, in order to see no more of the horror on the shore.

Indrajit lashed his winged horses, turned about and flew back leading his followers into the golden city. The gates of Lanka opened like a mother's arms to receive them. Rejoicing spread its beauty on the town.

Every house echoed with laughter again. Each street glowed as if a thousand suns were on it. Outside, the besiegers on the sand looked morose and downcast. The death of Sita had unnerved them all. If pleasure danced on the streets of Lanka, desolation surely ruled over the beach without.



CHAPTER XIX

INDRAJIT'S FALL

JUST then there was happening something that no one had noticed. Unexamined by the gatemen within, Vivisana and Rama's brother had swiftly stolen into Lanka. None, save Rama, knew where the two had gone, caught in the stream of Rakshasas returning with victory. Through a spell of magic all his own, Vivisana led Lakshmana into the city, hitherto impregnable to all. To such a plan of action, Rama was counselled by Vivisana.

"Now that he has not performed Nikumbhila," ex-

plained his uncle, "Indrajit is vulnerable. Lakshmana must follow even into Lanka and slay Ravana's off spring."

"How to achieve that? Tell me, friend Vivisana, if there is a way to punish this slayer of Sita," questioned Sita's lord.

"It was not Sita whom he slew," explained Vivisana.

"How,"—Rama and Lakshmana were so astonished at what they had heard that Vivisana repeated, "I am certain that it was a trick, O Rama. Do you think Ravana who has lost all his sons but one, his brother Kumbhakarna and thousands of friends and relatives for the sake of keeping Sita, would allow her to be butchered so?"

"Speak, speak, such words as thou hast spoken—let them fall like rain into my thirsty soul," begged the two brothers.

To that request, Vivisana said, "Now that Indrajit has stooped to such low magic, I will take Lakshmana into Lanka with me through Gupta-patha by my own magic art. I know a way that will take us to the heart of the capital. There we shall follow Indrajit who, I am certain, is going to his forest to perform Nikumbhila which will make him invulnerable. Now is the time to find and kill him. Follow me, hasten."

Lest Lakshmana lose his way in Lanka, Vivisana, who knew the city, went everywhere with him. All night they followed Indrajit, whithersoever he sped.

"He is going to his forest to perform Nikumbhila

yajna, O prince," whispered Vivisana again. "Let us go thither, and ere he starts his magic, give him battle immediately. Hither—sh—hsh——"

It was indeed good fortune that Indrajit's path skirted the Asoka forest that night. And destiny was doubly kind to let Lakshmana and Vivisana see Rama's bride and hear her in converse with Sarama, Vivisana's queen. That almost stunning shock of pleasure unnerved Lakshmana as he saw in the moonlight Sita's living form. And her speech to his listening tasted as a "broken honeycomb."

Before they had passed the Asoka forest, they heard Sita say to Sarama, "With thy husband's aid, Rama will win. He will rescue us both, thyself for Vivisana."

The pursuers of Indrajit, since they were hurried, could tarry no farther to make themselves known to anyone. They must destroy Indrajit tonight. Before that grim resolve, all else gave way. So they went their way, though their hearts were hungry for speech with the two women.

At last in the depth of a forest they stopped. There stood a temple of amethyst and topaz on the shore of a pool filled with liquid moon. There they noticed Indrajit. After totally unarming himself, he bathed in the waters, then coming ashore set to pray for magic powers. He was devotion incarnate, it seemed. That instant Lakshmana burst upon him.

"How darest thou come here?" thundered the slayer of Indra.

"I come to combat with thee. Be ready, for now I strike."

"Thou dog of a man! Ah, I see it is Vivisana who has led thee hither. Ho, noble uncle, the gem of treachery, thou diamond among traitors, thou very gold of cowardice, it is thou who hast brought this wretch here to slay me. He has learned, then, from thy purity-scoured mouth that until my yajna of Nikumbhila is finished, I am as mortal as he. But mortal though I be, I shall teach this brother of apes how Rakshasas can fight. Come, dog, bite."

"Bite I will," thundered Rama's brother, "but not like a dog. Here is thy uncle's weapon. Arm thyself with it." It fell with the Jhun jhuna shiver and clutter as Lakshmana took it from Vivisana's scabbard and threw it at Indrajit's feet. "Now taste death or make me taste it. Come thou, O arrogance."

Ere Indrajit had gripped the sword, the battle was joined. Like lions in a cage they fought. They shrieked and gored each other like bulls. Thrust and parry, parry and thrust, swifter than the fall of the bolt of Heaven, sharper than the edge of razors, the swords cut and hissed. In vain they thrust, and in vain they parried. They seemed too well-matched. At last, Lakshmana smote a blow that loosed the sword from Indrajit's hand. In despair and terror, the latter ran around the temple, flinging at Lakshmana lamps, torches and vessels that belonged to the Deity. But that redoubtable youth struck each thing down as if his sword

were hitting flowers in a mock fight. At last he caught Indrajit. The latter slipped, and as he was falling, Lakshmana thrust his sword into him with all his weight and might.

Lo, with a heart-rending yell of rejoicing, it seemed Indrajit's soul—a part of God, like all souls—was uncaged from the fiend's body and flew back to the Infinite from which it had fallen. But what a shriek! No man had ever before heard such a shriek of joy from a soul set free.

CHAPTER XX

INDRAJIT'S FUNERAL

GRIEF like the tusks of an elephant pierced him when Ravana learned of his son's fate. The chief God Indra, who for ages had been captive in Lanka through the prowess of Indrajit, now revolted and flew away to Heaven, shouting joyously. All the world heard him, including Ravana. Now that there was none to compel tribute of him, Indra, though yet alone, set up his rule in Heaven.

"O my son, cloud-dweller, O compeller of Indra, scorcher of foes!" Ravana raised the lament. He hurried with his court and all his wives to the forest where lay his eldest-born, inert as ivory striped with red. His eyes closed, his lips locked, his hair trembling in the breeze, struck terror into his father's heart. Death at last took a shape and form that Ravana understood and he trembled, as a tree when the axe is laid at its root.

"Is this death? I have never seen death before as I see it now." He exclaimed further, "I know, I see, I grasp—with Sita I brought not a woman, but death into our midst." Thus complained Ravana of his own folly in many metaphors. But they could not bring Indrajit back to life.

Indrajit's wife wailed as she flung herself on his body, and as a lioness' tongue licks her dead cub, her hand played over his white body. In response, not a breath, not a tremour of limb, not even the flutter of an eyelid made he. Like Mainaka—a mountain fallen into the ocean, Indrajit never rose again.

In the meantime Rama's truce-bearer was announced. He had come with the word, "The whole beach is cleared. All our troops are on the causeway. Bring forth your dead and cremate him with fitting ceremony. Truce reigns everywhere, O King."

At those words. Ravana realised that Rama was descended of royal kings. Only a noble man of long royal lineage understood what was befitting and when and how to perform the rites. The funeral procession wound out of Lanka to the beach at noon. At its head walked women who were more comely than other women, and their sorrowful treading communicated to all the woe of the unmothered and unhusbanded. Rama wept with Lakshmana as their eyes gazed upon what they had done to the fair women of that fair city.

After the women, came the bier, sombre as black

marble and covered with shrouds. He who had worn Parijat, the starflowers of Heaven, in life, now lay flowerless like a common thief.

Behind him stepped his widow, his son of ten and after them, Ravana, leading many warriors, all lamenting and contrasting mightily with the soft shedding of tears of the silent women.

Over the spectacle of death, there now appeared through the wide open gates, the wonder of all ages—Kanaka Lanka Poori—the gold-red city of Lanka. There shone neither sun nor moon, yet light never died completely there. The basilica of pomegranate-coloured gems, the walls of argent embossed with sapphire serpents, the brows of the houses, haughty with agate, emerald and opals. The fountains sobbing everywhere in their basins of platinum humbled the minds of men and monkeys. No such wonder had they dreamed of outside Heaven where Indra lives.

Now their ears caught the funeral strains. Lo, the sandalwood pyre was already burning, while a thousand priests intoned:

"Ayam asya dhamyate halir
Ayam girvi pariskrita."

They then chanted:

"Akasasthu niralamba—
Thou art homeless on the water,

Thou are homeless on the earth,
Thou art homeless in the air.

"Prehi, prehi pathivi purbervi—
Go, soul, on the dustless paths of mystery,
Reach the presence of God,
There abide in eternal glory."

CHAPTER XXI

THE FALL OF RAVANA

THE death of Indrajit had entered Ravana's soul and stung it like a cobra. Even torturing Sita with new devices ceased to please him. He commanded his watchers to treat her kindly. The fact was that his eldest-born's death had robbed him of all interest in her. Yet he would not return her to Rama, for that he imagined would lower the dignity of his house. Besides, he was too proud to do now what his brother Vivisana had counselled at the very beginning. So as soon as the period of mourning was over, he flung open

the gates of Lanka and issued forth at the head of his troops, "to un-Rama the whole earth."

His ten mouths roared like ten volcanoes. His ten pairs of teeth glistened like lightning. And the ten bows that his twenty arms used twanged like a herd of roaring lions. Behind, came Rakshasas of equally grim appearance. Some were half-lion and half-elephant; some had heads of rhinoceros and feet of men; some looked like crocodiles on tigers' legs. Others half-ape and half-wolf, still others black panthers with faces of human babes, came forward to destroy and devour men, monkeys and all. Drums made of sorrow, cymbals of woe, gongs of despair, and trumpets of horror with their noises struck terror into the hearts of the apes. Even Vir Hanuman shivered a moment before he stirred up his courage and attacked. Angada, who was shuddering now, followed his example.

Sugriva, that hurler of hills, shouted, "If you do not fall on them and kill them, fear will kill you. Forward, you sons of monkeys! Forward, O paragons of courage! Forward, dogs! Forward, O my brothers."

Screaming, weeping with despair, jabbering with rage and leaping with fury, they fell upon the Rakshasas. Belching forth death upon one another, apes and demons fought.

And over that universal chaos, rose Ravana's chariot driving through the air towards Rama and Lakshmana. It did not take them long to see him. Those two destitute human beings with their bows and arrows met

And over that universal chaos rose Ravana's chariot.

him whose armour was adamant and whose strength quenchless. Ravana's force had scorched and branded with the mark of slavery all the gods. The two brothers knew indeed too well that in that chariot of fire-gold sat one who was too powerful to be taken lightly, even by the gods.

But thought was put out of their minds by the thirst of action that possessed them. To Ravana's ten arrows they could send only two. So they hurried their hands. Their four eyes had to act for twenty. As a disc spins faster and faster till all one sees is but one revolving point, so they saw nothing but Ravana's chariot and aimed arrows at it. Arrows shrieked through the air. As rains mark with thousand scars a black hillside, so arrows streamed from Ravana. Leaping, stinging and singing arrows wove death in the air, and even the fleeing birds could not escape their meshes.

At last, Lakshmana cut Ravana's four arms and two heads. Scarcely had he done so, when a swarpa-pasa, cobra arrow, pierced his own arm, robbing it of all strength. Seeing his brother disabled so early in the conquest, Rama quadrupled his skill; roaring like a tawny torrent down a precipice, he rushed forward hurling terrible arrows: Indrastra, arrow of Indra; Rudraraga. Shiva's anger; Suryateja, the Sun's flames and Changra tusar, moon blizzard—he showered them upon Ravana. Like a forest of tuskers, Rama's arrows trumpeted forward.

But the demon King cut those arrows in the air

with his own, as a falcon with his talons scatters the feathers of its prey.

Just then, Indra sent down to Rama his magic chariot pulled by winged horses white as moonlight. Rama, urged by Matali the charioteer, leaped on it. Swiftly rising onto Ravana's level, he shouted, "Now you shall be quenched, O fire of evil."

Saying this, he flung at him the sharpest shafts. They stung Ravana like hornets. He wheeled around and manœuvred, but he could not dodge Rama's darts. At this juncture, Rama stopped to look below. There he saw Rakshasas and monkeys so mixed that they were like two fighting pythons lost in each other's coils. Ere he looked up again, Ravana had shot off the standard of Rama's chariot and wounded the charioteer. Still another shaft the monster sent, piercing Rama almost to death. At that, Matali, the charioteer, shrieked at him:

"Indra told me ere I came down that in thy quiver sleeps the arrow that will slay the ten-necked beast. Thou wert born to rid the earth of this fiend. While I wheel the chariot about, dodging every foul blow, recollect what thought thou hadst before thy soul was born as Rama. Dig out of the cavern of memory the name and nature of the weapon thou needest. It was called God's shaft. The world-sire put it in thy mind ere thou wast born. From thy thought thou hast fashioned it and put it to sleep in thy quiver. Pull it out

of its cradle now; let it fly from thy bow and hurl Ravana into his grave."

While Rama thought hard and deeply upon this saying, Matali drove his chariot like a rudderless boat on a stormy sea. Thus it eluded Ravana's death-edged arrows that filled the heavens with their humming.

At last Rama heard his own mind say, "Place the arrow named the 'edge of God' on the string of thy bow."

He did it more quickly than the telling. The shaft was like a thirsty living thing. As a tiger's tail, it seemed to lash. As an angry adder, it throbbed and hissed. Then, with the leap of an eagle, it scattered Ravana's arrows to the fleeing winds. It ploughed the sky against it as it sped. Comets and planets ran from their places as it pursued Ravana whithersoever he ran. . . .

"Too late, too late," cried the air, "too late, Ravana, too late."

The gods were heard saying, "Too late, monster."

Like the Himalayas falling at the world's end, Ravana fell with the arrow sizzling its way through his brain. His heads all pierced and his mind haunted by terrible images, he lay on the ground, dying.

Now, seeing their Lord fallen and vanquished, all the remaining Rakshasas fled for life. But the relentless Vanara followed hot-foot and captured all Lanka ere the Sun had set. Until each demon begged for mercy, they made him taste death in the skirmishes

that ensued. Now Hanuman, that priceless monkey, ran through the streets to the Asoka woods and broke the glad news to Rama's queen.

"Ravana is dead," he shouted with joy.

Alas, that shout was snuffed out like a candle light by the storm of wailing from the throats of the widowed Rakshasa wives. "Ha, Lanka, Ha, Ravana," drowned all other noises, as completely black night fell on Lanka for the first time in a thousand years. For with the fall of Ravana, the imprisoned gods were set free. And since they would serve Lanka no more and keep it in a state of perpetual twilight, the whole Rakshasa kingdom fell under the tyranny of seasons and shifting hours.

CHAPTER XXII

RAVANA'S FUNERAL

WHEN Vivisana saw his brother fall, an overwhelming sorrow possessed his soul. All the memories of his childhood with Ravana and Kumbhakarna, the years of severe penance before the God Shiva, then their wars with the gods under Indra, the fair fight for Paradise and its conquest, then a thousand years of peace and felicity in Lanka rushed upon him.

He wept bitter tears, "O my brother, O my Ravana, suckled at the same breast as I, through my help, art thou slain by Rama. What have I done? Who made me do it?"

He fell on his knees beside the mortally wounded Ravana. Though Rama had silenced many of his mouths, there remained one able to speak.

Hearing Vivisana's lament, Ravana answered, "Weep no more, brother. I bear thee no ill will. If I have any power in my soul, I use it now to forgive

thee. Look after the widows and orphans of Lanka. Rule in my stead, not as I did, but as a father rules his numerous offspring."

Those noble words spoken by Ravana made Vivisana weep all the more. "Thou hast spoken like thine old self. Now my youth's Ravana is back! Then, nobility was thy garment, benevolence, thy gesture, largeheartedness, thy conduct, and sweetness, thy speech. O Ravana, gather thy forces together, make an effort to live. Rule again in Lanka in thy ancient majesty."

But life was ebbing fast out of his body. He was in death's invincible grip. Now Rama asked Lakshmana, "What is the proper thing to do ere the Rakshasa chief dies?"

That resourceful youth pleaded ignorance thus: "We have been camping like rustics these fourteen years. Our minds have grown too soldierly, and our sense of courtesy has wasted away. It is wiser to ask Vivisana's advice, for he has been a courtier for centuries."

When they repaired to Vivisana and made known their wish, that lord of Sarama said in whispers, "It is the custom of royal masters to ask forgiveness of a fallen foe. That done, you must beg him to instruct you in life's philosophy. Lastly, you must ask him what he wishes you to do with the kingdom, queen and subjects that he leaves behind."

So with folded palms, the two brothers knelt on the

two sides of the dying Ravana and made him the threefold inquiry.

"Let me look upon you, O slayers of foes," said Ravana.

Vivisana lifted him up, then Rama drove three arrows deeply into the ground. Like three pillars, they supported Ravana's giant body. The dying chief smiled wanly and exclaimed, "O Rama, thou knowest how to treat a dying warrior. Uncultivated shopkeepers would have brought me pillows with which to prop me up. But this most recent act of thine bespeaks a hero better than aught else. Thou hast treated me well. Thou hast not insulted me with softness but given me the warrior's most fitting support of arrows. Thou, with unerring taste, hast served my sense of fitness ere I die."

"But I beg you, O royal hero," requested Rama, "to instruct me. Please satisfy our threefold inquiry."

"I forgive thee readily, O Rama. Now I beg thee to forgive my sins. . . . My wishes, I leave them to thine own instinct to fathom and carry out. A word about life's philosophy, then I shall take leave of life. What I shall say is very trite, but it is true. If thou inclinest to do a good deed, start it at once. If to do an evil act, thou feelest inclined, postpone starting it indefinitely. My own life is a parable. I once wished to build a marble stairway to Heaven so that all creatures could climb to God easily. Alas, I put off my dream from

day to day, till I dreamt no more of it. But when Surpanakha came and set my mind on fire with her scheme of robbing Sita from you, I did not tarry. I acted at once. Lo, to what pass that hasty evil deed has brought me! So learn by my example. Do selfless deeds at once. Those that are selfish put off, till they cease to trouble thy mind."

With those words spoken in a whisper, Ravana died at Rama's feet. Swiftly his soul rose like a bird of white fire, and soared to Heaven. A man who pays the penalty of an evil life here on earth is released from paying it hereafter. Ravana was amply chastised by Rama, and he needed no further chastising. So his spirit joined its sire—God.

Next day after his funeral when his ashes were scattered on the sea, Rama proclaimed Vivisana ruler of Lanka and solemnly signed a treaty of peace with the new King.

CHAPTER XXIII

SITA'S ORDEAL

THE joy of meeting after fourteen years of separation was so great that if Rama and Sita were asked to describe it, they could not have found adequate words. How then can the words of a stranger, the tongue of a poet, or the pen of a scribe do justice to such an event?

It is better that the thread of the story should be

taken up with Sita's ordeal. There was and still is in India an ancient custom which decrees that, if a woman who has been stolen, returns to her own people, she must show that she has been pure during the years of her absence. Though Sarama, Vivisana's queen, and other Rakshasas testified that Sita had always repelled the advances of Ravana, yet Rama and Sita both held it necessary that she should walk through fire. In case she came forth unscorched before many witnesses, then she could occupy her place as the queen of Ayodhya.

"My purity must be tested by the fire," she said to Rama.

So the day set for their departure from Lanka saw the ordeal of Sita. Indra with his recently liberated gods brought to Rama the Pushpaka Rath, aerial chariot, for his journey to Ayodhya. This they did to pay their debt to him. The latter was grateful in turn to Indra for the Rath that was sent him for fighting Ravana successfully. Rama thanked him in public; then men, beasts and gods wended their way to Sita's ordeal.

In another quarter of Ceylon, at its northern gate, a vast fire had been built and kindled. Surrounding it at a distance of ten yards stood Rakshasas, monkeys, the gods and the two human princes. Outside on the beach, horses and chariots of gold, opal, and silver thronged like fabulous dreams. Save for the champing of the steeds and the threne of the sea, the world was hushed with expectancy.

Everyone said in his heart, "Will Sita emerge from this fire ordeal unscarred, unscorched and unblemished?"

Only five persons were sure that she would. They were Rama, Lakshmana, Sarama, Vivisana and Hanuman. But all five of them were not nearly as sure as Sita herself. Those fourteen years she knew she had spent thinking of Rama, dreaming of Rama, and longing for Rama. Not a moment had she spent without Rama. Ravana might have tortured her for a thousand years more, yet she could not have been separated from Rama. Compared with those tortures of the past years, this fire test was nothing. That morning while Sarama, the present queen of the Rakshasas, was dressing her in the royal palace, Sita was thinking and enumerating to herself each of the subtle and sinister torments that Ravana had inflicted on her. And she wondered how she had withstood so much pain!

Thinking in that vein, she came to the gate of Lanka where the fire for her ordeal was burning. Slowly she advanced toward it. The assembled multitude was so moved by the vision of her face that from the gods to the apes, each one exclaimed, "Sadhu, pavitra—saintly purity abides in this woman."

The marble serenity of her face was augmented by the garment she wore; it trembled like waters of gold with every step she took. She walked on and on into the very forest of flames, not even pausing to distinguish where the pavements of Lanka ended and the

fire began. The flames the moment they touched the hem of her garment became white. Blade after blade of the garnet fire blanched and bent before her. Step by step, stem by stem, she trod. . . . At last she came forth smiling, triumphant. Even her dress had not caught fire. So great was her chastity!

When she emerged, unscarred, unblemished, the gods shouted with joy. The monkeys leapt up to the golden trees of Lanka and showered jewel-shaming flowers on Sita. The Rakshasas beat their drums while Rama and Lakshmana wept like souls lost in bliss.

Still, Sita walked on between the separating wall of gods and monkeys to the Pushpaka chariot. There she took her seat. Rama followed her example and seated himself by her. Lakshmana and others ascended different cars of celestial contrivance and made ready to depart.

After saying a final farewell to Vivisana and the gods, the men and monkeys rose to the sky and headed for Ayodhya.

Now Rama and Sita held sweet converse, and as they looked back upon the past fourteen years, they wondered if it were not better for their own happiness that both of them had endured so much, and triumphed so well.

"Behold," said Rama, "there is Lanka, a realm of beauty resting on the shoulder of the sea. The haughty brows of the houses gemmed with a thousand precious

stones, the gardens wrought like forests of Heaven, the brooks purling and preening themselves before their mirror, the stainless sky, those mountainous walls of gold, the ivory stairs of the sapphire bathing pools, and those birds—Chakrabakas—the iridescent-feathered pheasants, the silent peacocks, and the songsters pouring their melodies from trees, roofs and gilded balconies. As you look and listen, do you not feel that Lanka is not rustic as our own kingdom? It is not as rude as our own nation. O Sita, we have seen a most exalted civilization and conquered a foe worthy of our mettle. . . . Though we have suffered exceedingly, now that we have emerged with our love intact, it was all for the best.

"Now we are passing over the sea. There lies my bridge, a chain of rocks around the neck of the sea. Man, giants and beasts toiled to build it for the freeing of thee, my bride."

"But," cried Sita, "why, now that thy purpose is achieved, leave not the ocean free, my Lord? It is not meet that the sea should be left in chains by us who are at last free."

That instant Rama stooped over the side of the Rath, and with the end of his titanic bow pried out of place a dozen hills and flung them away, as a deer shakes off velvet from its antlers. Lo, the sea hissed and surged and flung its emerald arms this way and that, feeling its freedom in every limb. Thus was un-

done that bridge. Sita's kindness gave freedom even to the raging deep.

Today between India and Ceylon lies a stretch of giant rocks showing where Rama built his causeway, and where he undid it, in order to please his bride.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANJANA'S FAREWELL

AFTER witnessing Rama's coronation, which was celebrated in his native city with due pomp, Hanuman returned to his own little kingdom, with his soldiers who had aided Rama in his rescue of Sita.

The return of the little monkeys to their wives and children made the forests ring with shouts of joy, not for a day, but for a week. Over every home happiness smiled long and lovingly.

Hanuman's own palace was no exception to this rule. He and his mother seemed inebriated with gladness. The affairs of state were put in abeyance for a month. Neither mother nor son cared to think or speak of them.

Though hardened by war and made unusually callous by the sight of death every day for years, Hanuman's heart melted in the company of his mother. This was caused principally by the fact that he was speaking to one who understood his very soul. Not Jambuban, not Lakshmana, not Rama, not even his own sire Pavana ever gave him that immense sympathy which he received from his mother.

As a flood wipes out houses, bridges and forests, Anjana's love cleansed her son of the ghastly memories of war. He felt as one reborn. He forgot the war. The memory of cruel scenes, the thought of unrighteously slain friends, the decay of civilisation, and last of all his own pride in winning the war left him forever. In other words, Hanuman's soul found itself renewed in his mother's company.

Seeing that she had restored her son to the sanity of peace, one day Anjana said to him: "My lord, your father is again in Alaka—Heaven; you yourself have no further need of me. I must go to him."

Her words nearly stupefied Hanuman.

She continued, "It need not cause you pain, my son. You can come with me thither."

"But, but," Hanuman stammered, "must you go?"

"Yes," Anjana told him with tender firmness. "A big tree, if it does not die in time, does not let the little ones grow up from under its shadow. Since I am not mortal, I can not die. For your full development, I

must go to the Himalayas. Besides, your father needs me."

"I have lost my father. Why should I lose my mother?" Hanuman demanded in a voice made poignant with grief.

"Because my task is drawing to its end," Anjana reasoned with him. "Being your representative to your subjects is over; also being your mother is a thing completed. The demons of Lanka are subdued. The gods reign in Heaven. The righteous have humbled the unrighteous. Behold, you are grown into adulthood. Is it not time for me to say farewell? Besides, you can visit me yonder."

Hanuman nodded his head. He hardly understood the import of what he had heard. Though his mind agreed with Anjana's, all the same, his heart did not. A soul never lacking in speech, he became tongue-tied. Behind his eyes tears began to gather. His hands trembled as if he had been seized by abject terror.

Since the immortals do instantly what they say, his mother's form began to alter before his very eyes. The look of an aged monkey slowly passed. Wrinkle by wrinkle, the skin on her face changed. Her jaw pushed itself forward, the bridge of her nose reshaped itself, her lips became shorter, her eyes slanted, then the rest of her body, like stone suddenly turning into a statue, became a goddess.

The moon became a halo behind her head; she rose

above the ground standing on a cloud; the lightning hung from her waist and shoulders like a garment.

Lifting her two hands in a gesture of benediction, she proclaimed: "Now I crown thee Hanuman, God of Prowess. Your name will be Maha Vira—Mightiest Hero. Wherever there be a gymnasium, you shall be its guiding spirit. Wherever men meet in honourable and peaceful contest to establish the truth of prowess, you shall be invisibly present. You shall remain the God of athletes till the end of time."

While she was speaking, Hanuman noticed that his mother was being transformed further. No more was she the radiant goddess of youth, but was slowly passing into old age. Instead, lines and wrinkles common in aged mortals spread over her face, and into it came the shadow of death. This he could easily recognise, having seen so many die in war.

Without stopping there the metamorphosis continued. Out of the shadow of death rose the light of immortality, kindling a keener and at the same time a calmer fire in her eyes. Her lips trembled a second. Then, lo, she at present resembled the divinity that Hanuman had seen once before. It was almost the very self of Mother Earth.

"Mother," he exclaimed. Then pausing, he added, "Mother Earth."

"I am her daughter. In order to bring your soul into the world, I was projected into the monkey's world. I

was a nymph, who in turn assumed the character of a langur. Ere I retire into my inner recesses in Paradise, receive this, my last revelation. Your soul had to be born as a monkey in order to help Rama. You refused to be born in a monkey's body unless you could have two divinities for parents. Of the earth divinities, only a few are immortal. They are but deathless portion of the eternal Mother. Since I must live forever, now that your father wishes me to come to his side, permit me to hasten thither."

"What will happen to me after you are gone?" whimpered Hanuman like a child.

"Your destiny will be fulfilled no matter who comes or goes out of your life. No man nor God can interfere with it. Besides, remember you are an immortal. Hitherto you have known this truth vaguely. You are not like other monkeys who are mortals endowed with long life: Sugriva, Jambuban and others. They will live a thousand years. You shall outlive them all. Besides, you can take on any form you like. Remaining a monkey is a matter of choice with you."

The last words of Anjana were confused with a whir of wings like a fast-flowing brook combed by rain. From the northern heavens descended at her feet a cloud-chariot drawn by innumerable Haritakshas, birds of Paradise. They kindled the air into turgid colours.

It was a moment between their alighting and Anjana's taking her seat in the aerial conveyance. The en-

chanting birds spread their wings and flew in unison as if animated by a single will. They bore her northwards.

In order to keep her in sight, her heroic offspring followed. Though following that car was not an easy task, Hanuman kept up his pursuit. Hundreds of miles it covered in a moment. When what seemed an hour's time had passed, they reached the Himalayas, Nanga Parvat, Gauri Shankar, five hundred miles apart, which they covered in another quarter of an hour.

Now they reached Alaka, the capital of the gods. Here no desolation, but joyful song and dance greeted them, and a perpetual light, that of a moon-washed sunset, bathed the prospect on every side.

Just then, someone came towards Hanuman on a pair of wings.

"What lustre!" exclaimed the stupefied and exhausted monkey.

"It is your father's," he heard from the void.

"Open your eyes once more." Hanuman did as he was bid. A second glance on his features convinced him that they were his father's.

"Come," said Pavana kindly. "Visit the gods a while ere you return to your kingdom. Your mother is with them already."

Assuming his full splendour of a free god, Pavana flew beside his son. It exhilarated him to race with one second to no mortal in speed. But, lo, they had reached the foothills of the other side of the Himalayas where

rose the diamond ramparts of the palaces of the Storm-god.

Led by his father, Hanuman passed into that inner chamber where Anjana was awaiting them both. Hanuman was happy to find her again. At the same time, he felt a pleasant lack of excitement in it all, which was never vouchsafed to him on earth. His inner voice told him that in Heaven one becomes joyous without exciting his nerves. In it lies the main difference between the society of the gods and that of the mortals.

Hanuman stayed in Alaka nearly a month, if time were measured by the human conception of hours where no sun sets nor night draws down the curtain on the drama of existence. The beauty and splendour of his surroundings he found incomparable. Neither in Rama's capital of Ayodhya, nor in golden Lanka of Ravana had he seen such forms and colours. Even the smallest inhabitants of the place stood out as the clearest example of a perfect shape. There was not a person whose features were not impeccable. Though the strictest canons of art could not find the slightest flaw anywhere, yet the gods knew naught of the artificiality of art.

In spite of its dancing fountains, and ceaseless bird-songs, Alaka lacked that something which Hanuman needed. Nowhere could he find a sense of limitation. Whatever they desired, even the youngest of the gods could command it by thinking it a moment.

"No sense of limits," grumbled the great monkey.

No barrier obstructed a single path. No chance upset the gods' expectations. Everything was too free, far-flung and infinite. In such an atmosphere, like a raindrop fallen on the sea, Hanuman felt himself dissolving into infinitude. His stay became so painful to him that he complained to Anjana. He begged her to let him go back to earth.

"I must return to my monkeys. I need their company; otherwise, my character will perish. Please permit me to go."

"I shall gladly do so," responded his mother, "if you promise that you will come hither to see us whenever you need our help or our counsel."

Hanuman nearly wept with gratitude at such a prospect. Imagine a mortal free to enter and issue out of Heaven whenever it pleases his fancy. Can the elect and the perfect desire more in this universe?

His mother's latest proposal removed the pain of parting from his heart. He felt at peace. Before another cycle of hours that men call a day had passed our hero leaped from the tallest summit of the Himalayas, and set out for his little kingdom where dwelt only the mortals.

Here ends the tale of Hanuman's childhood, boyhood and youth. The events of his prime, if not more, at least as fabulous as those recorded in the preceding pages, belong to another volume.

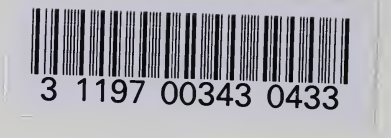
You who have listened to this recital of his heroic

deeds must bear in mind that to the boys and girls of India, the hero Hanuman is a symbol of prowess, fidelity and intelligence. Without that triple quality, no great character can achieve deathlessness in the eyes of posterity. But our hero had more. He won the franchise of the immortal gods.

What quality was in him that made him the equal of the divinities of Alaka?

The suffrage of the gods he earned through his humility. He was not afraid to be the humblest servant of Sugriva in disgrace, of Rama in the uttermost depth of dejection and destitution. Above all, he did not hesitate to toil for those insignificant monkeys who lived in the darkest terror of the crocodiles on the bank of the Kurmika. Such "sky-humbling humility" elevated him to the rank of the highest gods.

THE END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